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A NOVEL.

By MISS M. E. BRADDON.

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412	Some One Else. By B. M. Croker	20
413	Afloat and Ashore. By J. Fenimore Cooper	20
414	Miles Wallingford. (Sequel to "Afloat and Ashore.") By J Fenimore Cooper.....	20
415	The Ways of the Hour. By J. Fenimore Cooper.....	20
416	Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef. By J. Fenimore Cooper	20
417	The Fair Maid of Perth; or, St. Valentine's Day. By Sir Walter Scott.....	20
418	St. Ronan's Well. By Sir Walter Scott.....	20
419	The Chainbearer; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts. By J. Fenimore Cooper.....	20
420	Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts. By J. Fenimore Cooper.....	20
421	The Redskins; or, Indian and Injin. Being the conclusion of The Littlepage Manuscripts. J. Fenimore Cooper	20
422	Precaution. J. Fenimore Cooper	20
423	The Sea-Lions; or, The Lost Sealers. J. Fenimore Cooper	20
424	Mercedes of Castile; or, The Voyage to Cathay. By J. Fenimore Cooper.....	20
425	The Oak Openings; or, The Bee-Hunter. By J. Fenimore Cooper	20
426	Venus's Doves. By Ida Ashworth Taylor.....	20
427	The Remarkable History of Sir Thomas Upmore, Bart., M.P., formerly known as "Tommy Upmore." R. D. Blackmore.	20
428	Zéro: A Story of Monte Carlo. By Mrs. Campbell Praed.....	10

WYLLARD'S WEIRD.

A NOVEL.

By MISS M. E. BRADDON.

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WYLLARD'S WEIRD.

CHAPTER I.

IN A CORNISH VALLEY.

THERE are some travelers who think when they cross the Tamar, over that fairy bridge of Brunel's, hung high in air, between the blue of the river and the blue of the sky, that they have left England behind them on the eastern shore—that they have entered a new country—a new world almost. This land of quiet woods and lovely valleys, or bold brown hills, barren, solitary; these wild commons and large moorlands of Cornwall seem to stand apart, as they did in the days gone by, when this province was verily a kingdom, complete in itself, and owning no sovereignty but its own.

It is a beautiful region which the traveler sees, perchance for the first time, as the train skims athwart the quaint little water-side village of Saltash, and pierces the rich depths of the woodland—various, enchanting. Now the line seems strung like a thread of iron in mid-air above a deep gorge, now winds sinuous as a snake through a labyrinth of hills. A beautiful bit of road this between Plymouth and Bodmin Road at all times; but, perhaps, loveliest in the still evening hour, when the summer sunset steeps the land in golden light, while the soft summer wind scarcely stirs the woodland.

In the mellow light of a July eventide the express from Paddington swept with slackened speed around the curve of a viaduct between Saltash and Bodmin Road—a heavy wooden structure, spanning a vale of wild and Alpine beauty. A lovely little bit of scenery upon which the stranger is apt to look with some touch of fear mingled in the cup of his delight; but to the dweller in the district, familiar with every yard of the journey, the transit is as nothing. He is carried through the air serenely as he smokes his cigar and reads his paper, and the notion of peril never occurs to him.

One man, sitting by the window of a third-class carriage, near the end of the train, looked out at the familiar scene dreamily to-night. He was an elderly, gray-headed man, a parish doctor, hard-worked and poorly paid, but he had a keen eye for the beautiful in nature, dead or living, and familiar as this spot was to his eye, it always impressed him. He sat with his face to the engine, puffing lazily at his little black brierwood, and gazing at the landscape, in that not unpleasant condition of bodily and mental fatigue, when the mind

seems half asleep, and the external world is little more than a dream-picture.

The train was not a long one, a good many of the London carriages having been left behind at Plymouth. Dr. Menheniot had all the carriages full in view as they swept round the curve. There was a head here and there by a window, but the train seemed sparsely occupied. They were nearing a bridge which crossed a ravine of wildest beauty. That narrow thread of water trickling over its rocky bed in the depth of the gorge was in winter a rushing torrent. The bridge was under repair, and the wooden palisade had been removed in the progress of the work. The actual danger was in no wise increased by the absence of this barrier, which would have smashed and crumbled like match-wood before the weight of the train had the engine run off the rails; but there was a seeming insecurity to the eye of the traveler as he looked into the gulf below; and Dr. Menheniot gave an involuntary shudder. Another moment and the engine came on the bridge. Menheniot started up with a half articulate exclamation:

"What in God's name—?" he began.

He opened the carriage door—seemed as if he were going to clamber out—to try and make his way along the footboard to a distant carriage, outside which a girl was standing, holding on to the brass hand-rail at the side of the door. She had that instant stepped out, or had been thrust out, Menheniot knew not which. He had seen nothing till he saw her standing there—a slender figure in a light-colored gown, light, thin draperies fluttering in the wind—standing there hanging between life and death, a creature to be rescued somehow, were it at the hazard of a man's life.

Before he could put himself in peril, the chance of rescue was over. A wild shriek rang through the wood—a fluttering form went whirling down the ravine, flashing white athwart the sunlit scenery, and lay half buried amidst a tangle of fern and wild flowers at the bottom of the gorge.

Twenty or thirty heads were thrust out of the windows. The train, which to Dr. Menheniot's eye just now had seemed almost empty, was now alive with people. The engine slackened speed, and stopped at about a hundred yards from the scene of the catastrophe. A dozen men of different ages and qualities leaped out of the train, and clambered down the embankment, among others Julian Wyllard, the rich banker, and lord of the manor of Penmorval, a man of middle age, in spotless broadcloth, a tall, stately figure, a man of mark in this part of the country, before whom all gave way, except little Dr. Menheniot, who hurried on ahead, intent upon affording professional help, if such help could avail.

Mr. Wyllard had been an athlete in his boyhood and youth. He walked down the steep, rugged hill-side more easily than many men walk down Regent Street. When they got to the bottom of the embankment every one fell back involuntarily, as it were, and allowed Mr. Wyllard to head the procession. They went as fast as it was possible to go over that broken ground, trampling down the ferns and flowers, wild strawberries, strange many-hued fungi, as they went, every lip breathless, every eye strained toward that one spot in the hollow yonder where the doctor was hastening.

"No use, I fear," said Julian Wyllard, as if answering the common thought. "The poor creature must be quite dead."

"What, in mercy's name, made her do it?" speculated a burly farmer. "Was she frightened, do you think, by some ruffian in the train, or did she want to make away with herself?"

The little cluster of passengers looked at one another curiously, as if seeking among those rustic countenances for the face of a scoundrel capable of assailing unprotected innocence. But if guilt were present in that assembly, there was no outward indication of the diabolical element. Almost every one there was known to the rest; small farmers, a squire or two, the elderly lawyer from Camelford, the curate of Wadebridge, a magistrate of Bodmin—a corn-chandler and respectable inhabitant of the same town. Assuredly not among these would one look for that lower order of man who is viler in his degraded manhood than the wild beasts of the jungle.

There might be other passengers lurking in the train, among those loquacious women up yonder, who were all putting their heads out of windows, straining their necks to get their share in the pity and the terror of the tragedy down below.

Mr. Wyllard and his companions found little Dr. Menheniot on his knees beside the piteous figure lying in a heap, like a limp rag, among ferns and ground ivy.

He had lifted the poor bruised head upon his arm, and he was looking down at the dead face, the open eyes gazing in the set stare of a great horror—horror at the wretch who flung her down, or at the awful gulf of death self-sought? Who could tell? Those blood-bedabbled lips were mute for evermore, unless the dead could be conjured into speech.

"Is she quite gone?" asked Julian Wyllard, his grave compassionate countenance calm, amidst the agitation of the little crowd.

That spectacle of sudden violent death was no new thing to his eyes. He had lived in Paris during the siege and the Commune, had seen the corpses laid out in long rows in the cemeteries, and lying in bloody heaps in the streets.

"Quite dead, and a blessed thing, too," answered the doctor. "I don't believe she has a whole bone in her body. She could only have lingered a little while to suffer agonies. Her neck is broken. Poor little thing! She is quite a young creature, and must have been pretty."

Yes, it was a pretty little face, even in the pallor of death. A small *retroussé* nose; large dark eyes, with long black lashes; pouting, childish lips; a delicately-moulded figure, neatly dressed in dark blue cotton, a linen collar cut low in the front, and showing a good deal of the long white throat, linen cuffs, long thread gloves, and little stuff boots.

"She looks like a furriner," said Mr. Nicholls, the burly farmer who had speculated as to the cause of her death.

"Hadn't somebody better examine her pockets for any papers which may identify her?" said a voice behind Mr. Wyllard.

It was the voice of a young man who had been the last to leave the train. He had followed the rest at a few paces' distance, and had only just arrived to look at the dead girl over Mr. Wyllard's shoulder.

"You here, Bothwell?" exclaimed the banker, turning quickly.

"Yes, I have been in Plymouth all day, and thought I'd get back by your train," answered Bothwell Grahame, easily. "Don't you think they ought to examine her pockets?"

"Certainly; but it is a question as to whether it should be done now or later," said Wyllard. "She was evidently traveling alone, poor creature, and she must have been in a compartment by herself, since nobody seems to know anything about her. The chief thing to be done is to get her carried on to Bodmin Road, where there must be an inquest."

Everybody agreed that this was the voice of wisdom. Dr. Menheniot turned out the pocket of the neat cotton gown. There was nothing but a handkerchief, a little bunch of keys, and a second-class railway ticket for Plymouth, no card-case or purse, or even an old letter to offer a clew to the dead girl's personality. This done, the doctor arranged the poor dislocated form decently, and two sturdy men lifted it from the greenery and carried it gently up the embankment to the train, where that unconscious clay was laid on the seat of an empty second-class compartment.

"It is the very carriage she was in," said Bothwell, pointing to a torn strip of gray alpaca hanging on the metal handle. "Her gown must have caught on the handle as she fell, and this shred was left behind."

Bothwell gave the bit of alpaca to Dr. Menheniot.

"You can show that to the coroner," he said. "Of course, you will be a witness."

"About the only one necessary, I should think," said the doctor; "I saw her fall."

"Did you?" exclaimed Mr. Wyllard. "That's lucky; and what was your impression as to the manner of her fall? Whether she deliberately threw herself out, or whether she was thrown out by a villain?"

This was asked in a lowered voice, since the murderer, if the deed were murder, might be within hearing.

"Upon my soul, I can not tell," protested Menheniot, with a troubled look. "The whole thing was so rapid. It passed like a flash. I was smoking, tired, in a dozy condition altogether, and this horrible thing seemed like a dream. I saw no other head at the carriage window. I saw nothing but that girl standing on the foot-board as the train came on to the bridge, and then, all in a moment, I saw her whirling down into the gorge, like a feather blown out of a window. If it was suicide, she certainly hesitated, for when I first saw her she was standing on the foot-board holding the hand-rail by the side of the door. She did not leap out of the train with one desperate, deliberate spring. However determined she may have been to kill herself, she must have faltered in the act."

"It would be only human to do so. Poor young thing—a mere child," said Julian Wyllard, regretfully.

He talked apart with the guard, recommending that official to keep his eye upon the passengers who got out at Bodmin Road, and at all stations further down the line; to mark any man of ruffianly appearance or agitated demeanor; to give any such person in charge if he saw but the slightest reason for suspicion.

The passengers had resumed their seats by this time, and the train began to move slowly onward. The whole period of delay had not been twenty minutes, and the line between Plymouth and Penzance was tolerably clear at this hour. The train would be able to pull up lost time before it reached its destination.

"You had better come into my carriage," said Julian Wyllard to the young man whom he had addressed as Bothwell.

"I have only a third-class ticket," answered the other. "I've been smoking."

"I never knew you doing anything else," said the banker, with a touch of scorn. "Go back to your third-class carriage. No doubt you want another pipe."

"I believe, after that shock, it will do me good," said the young man, producing his cigarette-case on the instant and lighting up.

Mr. Wyllard went back to the compartment where he had been sitting at ease all day and alone. There is a mysterious power in the presence of such a man which, save in the stress of the tourist season, can generally secure solitude. The tourist season had not yet begun, and Mr. Wyllard was known to be good for half-a-crown, and never to offer less; so his particular compartment was sacred. Even bishops and notabilities of the land were hustled away from the door beguiled by the promise of something better elsewhere.

He had strewed the carriage with newspapers and magazines, and now he began to collect all this literature and to strap it neatly together before arriving at his journey's end. He was neat and methodical in all small matters, yet he was in nowise a prig or a pedant. His tall, robust frame and strongly marked features were upon a large scale. He had a large brain and a large manner.

Look at him now, as he sits in his corner of the luxurious carriage, against a background of light drab cloth. A man in the prime of manhood, five-and-forty at most; a fine head, well set on, light brown hair, thick and silky, brushed aside from a broad square forehead, in which there are all the indications of intellectual power. Large, full blue eyes, whose normal expression is severe, but the severity softens when the man smiles, changes to radiance and sparkles when the man laughs. He has a beautiful smile, a hearty, sonorous laugh, and a voice of power and compass, rare among English voices. The features are firmly modeled, bold, massive; the mouth, when the lips are closely set, as they are just now, looks as if it were cut out of stone. A man likely to love profoundly, and not likely to hate lightly. A stanch friend, as everybody knows in this part of the country, but perchance a deadly foe, were great provocation given; a man to keep a secret as closely as the grave itself. A man to give money as freely as if it were water; large-minded in all things—yes, that phrase would most faithfully describe him.

The train stopped at Bodmin Road, in a picturesque valley, deep amidst pine-clothed hills, and adjoining an estate of exceptional beauty. There was a quiet little roadside inn, about five minutes' walk from the station, and to this strange hostelry the dead girl was conveyed, a shrouded form lying on a shutter, and carried by two railway porters. She was laid in a darkened chamber at the back

of the house, to await the advent of the coroner, a gentleman of some importance, who lived ten miles off.

An open carriage was waiting for Julian Wyllard, and in the carriage sat a beautiful woman, smiling welcome upon him as he came out of the station. The dead girl had been carried out by another way. The lady in the carriage knew nothing of the tragedy.

"How late the train is this evening," she said. "I was beginning to get uneasy."

"There has been an accident."

"An accident? Oh, how dreadful! But you are not hurt," she cried, anxiously, looking at him from top to toe, suspicious of some deadly injury which he might be heroically concealing.

"No, it was not a railway accident. There is no one hurt except a poor girl who threw herself, or was thrown, out of the train."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Mrs. Wyllard. "Is it any one we know—any one about here?"

"No; she is quite a stranger, poor child, and from her dress and general appearance I should take her to be a Frenchwoman. But we shall know more after the inquest."

"How dreadfully sad! A stranger, alone in a strange land, and to meet such a death! But do you really believe that any one threw her out of the train, Julian? That seems too terrible to be true!"

"My dear, I believe nothing. The poor creature's fate is shrouded in mystery. Whether she killed herself or whether any one killed her is an open question. I told the guard and the station-master to be on the alert, and to stop any suspicious character. I shall call at the police-office as we drive through the town. Here is Bothwell," added Mr. Wyllard, as the young man came sauntering lazily along, throwing away the end of a cigarette as he came. "Did you know that he had gone to Plymouth?"

"Not I. He did not appear at luncheon, but as he is always erratic, I did not even wonder about him. What took you to Plymouth this morning, Bothwell?" she asked, as her cousin came up to the carriage-door.

They were first cousins, and it was his cousinship with Julian Wyllard's beautiful wife which secured Bothwell Grahame free quarters at Penmorval. They were children of twin sisters, who had loved each other with more than common love, who had seldom been parted till death parted them untimely. Bothwell's mother was cut off in the flower of her youth and beauty, leaving her only child an infant; her husband a broken-hearted man. Captain Grahame went to India with his regiment, less than a year after his wife's death, to fight and fall in the Punjaub, and Bothwell, the orphan, was brought up by his mother's sister, Mrs. Tregony Dalmaine, at a lovely old manor-house near the Land's End.

He was four years old when Theodora Dalmaine was born, and he was to the child as an elder brother. They were brought up together, played together, and shared the same school-room and the same governess, till Bothwell was drafted off to Sandhurst, having set his heart upon being a soldier, and in his father's regiment. The bright, quick-witted girl was considerably in advance of the boy in all their mutual studies, despite his superior age. She was industrious where he was idle, for it must be owned that even in the be

ginning of things Bothwell was somewhat scampish in his mind and habits.

He did pretty well at Sandhurst, passed his examinations respectably, if not with *éclat*. His heart was set upon soldiering, and he did not object to work when his heart was in the labor. He was a good soldier, and one of the most popular men in his regiment. He saw a good deal of active service in Afghanistan, not without distinction, but he came to grief in spite of his many good qualities. He "plunged" heavily, squandered every shilling of his small patrimony, got into debt, got into scrapes of various kinds, and finally left the army, and thus dropped out of that one career for which nature and education had especially fitted him, turned aside from the one path which might have led him to fame and honor. And now he was an idler, without place or station in the world, money, or repute, an incumbrance and a burden to his family, as he told himself every day. He had vague ideas of chalking out a career for himself, had visions of colonial paradises where he might do wonders; was always devising some new plan, inclining to some new place; but the visions had not yet taken any tangible form. He was always falling in with some new adviser who wrenched all his ideas out of the soil in which they had taken root, and transplanted them to another locality.

"Spanish America," said Smith; "don't think of it. You would be dead in a week. Have you never heard of the *vomito negro*, the deadliest disease known to man? Otaheite is the place for you, a superb climate, a new area for an enterprising young Englishman. You would make your fortune in three years."

Then came Jones, who laughed at the notion of the South Sea Islands, and advised Bothwell to get a tract of waste land near the mouth of the Gironde, and grow fir-trees and export their resin; that was the one certain road to fortune. You had first your resin, a large annual revenue, and then you had your timber for railway sleepers, returning cent per cent. Bothwell did not venture to ask how you got your resin after you had sold your timber.

Anon came Robinson who recommended Canada and the lumber trade; and after him Brown, who declared that the only theater for intelligent youth was the interior of Africa. In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom, says Scripture; but Bothwell found that in the multitude of counselors there is bewilderment akin to madness. He had an honest desire to get his own living, but so far uncertainty as to the manner of getting it had barred the way to fortune.

"What took me to Plymouth?" he repeated. "Upon my word, I hardly know. It was so deadly quiet at Penmorval this morning. I wanted to hear the voices of my fellow-men. I went third-class, you know, Dora. It wasn't a very extravagant proceeding," he murmured, confidentially. "Shall I ride on the box?"

"You had better come inside," said Wyllard; "there is plenty of room," whereupon Bothwell took the back seat of the barouche, opposite his cousin and her husband.

Bodmin town was some miles from Bodmin Road, a lovely drive in the tranquil July eventide; but both those men were haunted by the vision of that dead face, those dislocated limbs, hanging loose-

ly, like a dead stag hauled along by the huntsmen. An event so terrible was not to be dismissed lightly.

"I wonder who she was, and where she was going?" said Bothwell.

"Some little nursery governess, I dare say, going to her situation."

"In that case, we shall hear all about her at the inquest. She will have been expected, and her employers will come to the fore."

"What a terrible thing for her parents, if they are living; most of all for her poor mother," said Mrs. Wyllard.

She pronounced the last word with peculiar softness. She had an exalted idea of the sacredness of the relationship between mother and child. She had passionately loved her own mother; had passionately longed for a child in the earlier years of her wedded life. But she had been a wife seven years, and no child had lived to bless her. A son had been born within a year of her marriage, born only to die, and now she had left off hoping that she would ever be called upon this earth by the dear name of mother.

They drove past familiar woods, and hills, ferny dells, and crystal streamlets. They saw the great brown torse standing afar off against the amber sky, but that one haunting thought of a horrible death spoiled all the beauty of the scene. They had no eyes for the landscape, but sat in serious silence.

Mr. Wyllard alighted at the Bodmin police station, and spent about ten minutes in conversation with the inspector, who was at once shocked and elated on hearing of the strange death on the railway. He was shocked at the horror of the thing; he was elated at the idea of an inquiry and investigation which might result in glory and in profit to himself.

Mrs. Wyllard and Bothwell sat in the carriage while her husband and the official conversed gravely just inside the threshold of the station-house. Bothwell talked about the girl and her mysterious death. He described the poor little white face, the look of horror in that wide, glassy stare of death.

"Did she look like a lady?" asked Dora, full of painful interest.

"Hardly, I think. She had that pretty neat appearance which one sees in French girls of a class just a little above the grisette. Her frock and her boots and her cotton gloves must all have suited herself and her station to a nicety. There was no touch of that vulgar finery which makes a half-bred English girl so odious. I dare say Wyllard is right, and that she was a poor little governess going out into a strange land to earn her bread and learn a foreign language. There are thousands who go out every year, I have no doubt, only this one has contrived to jump into notoriety and an early grave at the same time. By Jove, here comes the coroner. We shall be the first to tell him that he will be wanted to-morrow."

Mrs. Wyllard blushed faintly as she turned to look at an approaching horseman. She had not even to this day left off blushing at any sudden mention of Edward Heathcote's name; and yet it was eight years since she had jilted him in order to marry Julian Wyllard.

A sad story, all forgiven now, if not forgotten. A deep wrong done by a noble-hearted woman to a noble-hearted man. It was the one act of Theodora Wyllard's life which she could not look back

upon without remorse. In all other relations of life she had been perfect—devoted daughter, devoted wife. But in this one thing she had sinned. This man had loved her faithfully, fondly, from the dawn of her girlish beauty, from the beginning of her womanly grace. She had accepted his love, and seemed to herself to return it, measure for measure. She had looked forward to the years when they two would be one. And then in an hour another face flashed across the foreground of her life—a new voice thrilled her ear—an influence was exercised over her which she had never felt before, a power too potent for resistance — and in a moment of passionate self-abandonment she had cast herself at Edward Heathcote's feet, and had confessed her love for another. Julian Wyllard had broken down all barriers, had asked her to be his wife, knowing her to be engaged to another man. But a great irresistible love outweighs all scruples of honor or conscience.

"Why do you ask me for your freedom, as if it were so great a favor?" Heathcote asked, bitterly, as he lifted her up from her knees. "Do you think I would have you—this mere beautiful clay—now that your heart has gone from me? Do you think I, who love you a hundred times better than I love myself, would stand between you and happiness? You are free, Dora. I have seen this misery coming upon me for the last month."

"And you will forgive me?" she pleaded, with clasped hands, looking at him with streaming eyes, sorry for him, deeply ashamed of her infidelity.

"Can I be angry with you, loving you as I do? God forgive you, darling, in all your sins, large or small, as freely as I forgive your sin against me."

He kissed her unresisting lips for the last time, and so left her, as nearly broken-hearted as a man can be and yet recover.

He did recover, or was at any rate supposed to be cured, since two years after Theodora Dalmaine's marriage he married a fair young girl, penniless, friendless, and an orphan; a wife who loved him as he deserved to be loved, and who, after three years of wedded life, died, leaving two children, twin daughters. It was three years since the grave had closed upon her, and Edward Heathcote was still a widower, and was believed to have no thought of marriage.

He came riding slowly along the street in the fading light, a man of striking appearance, mounted on a fine horse, a man of about seven-and-thirty, tall, broad-shouldered. He had a dark complexion, and dark brown hair, deep-set gray eyes, which looked almost black under dark heavy brows, an aquiline nose, a heavy mustache and beard.

He had begun life as a younger son, and had practiced for some years as a solicitor in the town of Plymouth—had been town-clerk, and a man of public importance in that town—when his elder brother died a bachelor, and Edward Heathcote inherited a snug little estate near Bodmin, with a curious old country house called the Spaniards, having been so named in honor of the Spanish chestnuts which flourished there in great luxuriance and beauty. On becoming owner of the Spaniards and the estate that went with it, Edward Heathcote retired from the law, and went to live at the place of his birth, where he lived a secluded life with his baby girls, letting his

days glide by in the quiet monotony of a country squire's life, hunting and shooting, sitting in judgment upon poachers and small defaulters at petty sessions, and acting as coroner for his division of the county. He had been leading the life of placid rural respectability for a year.

He rode up to the carriage and shook hands with Mrs. Wyllard. He was her neighbor, and had visited at Penmorval during the last year. There had never been the faintest indication in his manner or his speech that Julian Wyllard's wife was any more to him than a friend. He was pleased to visit her, anxious that she should be interested in his motherless children, pleased to confide his plans and his thoughts to her. Time had sobered his enthusiasm, and softened all bitter memories. He took life now as a gentle legato movement. He had lived and suffered, and done his duty, and that which was left to him was rest. He sat down among his fields and his vineyards to take his ease just a little earlier than other men, that was all. A great sorrow suffered in the morning of life ages a man at least by a decade.

"Why are you waiting outside the station-house?" he asked. "Have you had an alarm of burglars at Penmorval?"

"It is something much worse than that," answered Mrs. Wyllard, gravely; and then Bothwell related the catastrophe on the railway. Julian Wyllard came back to the carriage just as Bothwell finished.

"This will be a job for you, Heathcote," he said.

"A very sad one. The story has a brutal sound to me, remembering past stories of the same kind," answered Mr. Heathcote. "It shall not be my fault if the ruffian escapes."

"You think there is a ruffian, then? You don't take it for a case of suicide?"

"Decidedly not," replied the other, promptly. "Why should a girl choose such a death as that?"

"Why should a girl throw herself off the Monument?" demanded Mr. Wyllard. "Yet we know girls had a rage for doing that fifty years ago. However, you will have a good opportunity for the display of your legal acumen in a really mysterious case. I did all I could in my small way to put the officials on the alert along the line; and if any scoundrel had a hand in that poor child's death, I don't believe he will get off too easily. Where are you riding?"

"Only for an evening stroll over the downs."

"You had better come home and have supper with us. It will be too late to call it dinner."

"No, thanks; I dined at seven. Besides, I shall have to arrange about this inquest for to-morrow. I'll talk to Morris, and then ride on to the Vital Spark, and settle matters with the people there."

The Vital Spark was the small road-side inn, where the dead girl was lying. The Wyllard barouche drove off while Edward Heathcote stopped to talk to Morris, the inspector. The jury would have to get notice early next morning. The inquest was to be held at five in the afternoon. This would give time for the tradesmen to

get away from their shops. The chief business of the day would be over.

"It will give time for any one in this neighborhood, who knows anything about the girl, to come forward," added Mr. Heathcote. "If she was going to a situation in this part of the world, as Mr. Wyllard suggests, some one must know all about her."

"What a man he is, Mr. Heathcote," said the inspector admiringly. "Such clearness, such decision; always to the point."

"Yes, he is a very superior man," answered Heathcote, heartily. He had schooled himself long ago to generous thoughts about his rival. It pleased him to know that Dora had been lucky in her choice; that she had not taken a scorpion into her bosom when she preferred another man to himself. He had wondered sometimes—in a mere idle wonder, when he saw her in her beautiful home at Penmorval—whether it would have been possible for him to make her life happier than Julian Wyllard had made it; whether, in his uttermost adoration, he could ever have been a better husband to her than Julian Wyllard had been. He had looked searchingly for any flaw in the perfection of that union, and he had perceived none. He was generous-minded enough to be glad that it was so.

The carriage drove slowly up a long hill, and across a wide expanse of heathy ground, before it entered the gate of Penmorval, which was two miles from the town. It was a beautiful old place, standing on high ground, yet so richly wooded as to be shut in from the outer world. Only the Cornish giants, Roughtor and Brown Willie, showed their dark crests above the broad belt of timber which surrounded the good old Tudor mansion. A double avenue of elms and yews led to the old stone porch. The long stone façade facing northward looked out upon a level lawn divided from the park by a haw-haw. The southern front was curtained with rose and myrtle, and looked upon one of the loveliest gardens in Cornwall, a garden which had been the pride and delight of many generations—a garden for which the wives and dowagers of three centuries of Cornish squires had labored and thought. Nowhere could be found more glorious roses, or such a treasury of out-of-the-way flowers, from the finest to the simplest that grows. Nowhere did April sunlight shine upon such tulips and hyacinths, nowhere did June crown herself with fairer lilies, or autumn blaze in greater splendor of dahlias, hollyhocks, and chrysanthemums. The soil teemed with flowers. There was no room left for a weed.

For a childless wife like Dora Wyllard a garden such as this is a kind of spurious family. She has her hopes, her fears, her raptures and anxieties about her roses and chrysanthemums just as mothers have about their girls and boys. She counts the blossoms on a particular Gloire de Dijon. She remembers the cruel winter when that superb John Hopper succumbed to the frost. She has her nostrums and remedies for the green-fly, as mothers have for measles. That glorious old garden helped to fill the cup of Mrs. Wyllard's happiness, for it gave her inexhaustible employment. With such a garden she could never say, with the languid yawn of the idle and the prosperous, "What can I do with myself to-day?" But Dora was not dependent on her garden for occupation. Exacting as the roses and the lilies were, manifold as were the cares of

the hot-houses and ferneries and wildernesses, Mrs. Wyllard's husband was more exacting still. When Julian was at home she could give but little time to her garden. He could hardly bear his wife to be out of his sight for half an hour. She had to be interested in all his schemes, all his letters, even to the driest business details. She rode and drove with him, and as he had no taste for field sports, neither his guns nor his hunters took him away from her. He was a studious man, a man of artistic temperament, a lover of curious books and fine bindings, a lover of pictures, and statues, and porcelain and enamels—a worshiper of the beautiful in every form. His tastes were such as a woman could easily and naturally share with him. This made their union all the more complete. Other wives wondered at beholding such domestic sympathy. There were some whose husbands could not sit by the domestic hearth ten minutes without dismal yawnings, men who depended upon newspapers for all their delight, men whose minds were always in the stable. Julian Wyllard was an ideal husband, who never yawned in a *tête-à-tête* with his wife, who shared every joy and every thought with the woman of his choice.

To-night, when they two sat down to the half-past nine o'clock meal with Bothwell, who was not much worse than a Newfoundland dog, for their sole companion, the wife's first question showed her familiarity with the business that had taken her husband to London.

"Well, Julian, did you get the Raffaelle?" she asked.

"No, dear. The picture went for just three times the value I had put upon it."

"And you did not care to give such a price?"

"Well, no. There are limits, even for a monomaniac like me. I had allowed myself a margin. I was prepared to give a hundred or two over the thousand which I had put down as the price of the picture, but when it went up to fifteen hundred I retired from the contest, and it was finally knocked down to Lamb, the dealer, for two thousand guineas. A single figure—a half-length figure of Christ bearing the cross, against a background of vivid blue sky. But such an adorable countenance, such pathetic eyes. I saw women turn away with tears after they had looked at that picture."

"You ought to have bought it," said Dora, who knew that her husband had a great deal more money than he could spend, and who thought that he had a right to indulge his own caprices.

"My dearest, as I said before, there are limits," he answered, smiling at her enthusiasm.

"Then you had your journey, and I had to endure the loss of your society for three dreary days, all for nothing," said Dora.

"Not quite for nothing. There was the pleasure of seeing a very fine collection of pictures, and some magnificent Limoges enamels. I succeeded in buying you a little Greuze. I am told by French art critics that it is a low thing to admire Greuze—the sign of a vulgar mind. He is the painter of the *bourgeois*, the *épicier*. But, for all that, you and I have agreed to like Greuze, so I bought this little picture for your morning-room. I got it for five hundred and fifty, and I believe it is a genuine bit in the painter's best manner."

"How good you are to me," exclaimed Dora, getting up and going over to her husband.

She bent down to kiss him as he sat at the table. They had dismissed the servants from this informal meal, so Mrs. Wyllard was not afraid of being considered eccentric, if she showed that she was grateful. She did not mind Bothwell. Five hundred and fifty. How freely this rich man talked of his hundreds, as it seemed to Bothwell, pinched by the consciousness of debts which the cost of that picture would have covered, little seedlings of debts, scattered long ago by the wayside, and putting forth perennial flowers in the shape of unpleasant letters from creditors, which made him hate the sight of the postman.

Neither Wyllard nor Grahame ate a hearty meal. That picture of the dead face was too vividly present in the minds of both. Meat and drink and pleasant talk were out of harmony with that horror which both had looked upon three hours ago. They took more wine than usual, and hardly ate anything.

"Will you come for a stroll in the garden, Julian?" asked Dora, as they rose from the table.

It was half-past ten o'clock, a lovely summer night. A great golden moon was shining low down in the purple sky, just above the bank of foliage, not that far off moon which belongs to all the world, but a big yellow lamp lighting one's own garden.

"Do come," she said, "it is such a delicious night."

"I dare not indulge myself, dear, I have my letters to open before I go to bed. I was just going to order a fire in my study."

"A fire, on such a night as this? I'm afraid you have caught cold."

"I think it not unlikely," answered her husband, as he rang the bell.

"Don't you think your letters might keep till to-morrow morning, Julian?" pleaded Dora. "We could have a fire in the morning-room, and sit and talk."

"That would be delightful; but I must not allow myself to be tempted. I should not rest to-night with the idea of a pile of unopened letters."

He gave his orders to the servant. His letters and papers were all on his study table. A fire was to be lighted there immediately.

"You will be late, I am afraid," said Dora.

"I may be a little late. Don't wait up for me on any account, dearest. Good night!"

He kissed her, and she said good-night, but reserved her liberty to sit up for him all the same. There is no use in a husband saying to a wife of Mrs. Wyllard's temperament, "Don't sit up for me, and don't worry yourself!" Sleep was impossible to Dora until she knew that her husband was at rest, just as happiness was impossible to her when parted from him. She had made herself a part of his being, had merged her very existence with his; she had no value, hardly any individuality apart from him.

"Julian looks tired and anxious," she said to her cousin, who stood smoking a cigarette just outside the window.

"You can't be surprised at that," answered Bothwell. "That

business on the railway was enough to make any man feel queer. I shall not forget it for a long time."

"It must have been an awful shock. And men with strong natures and powerful frames are sometimes more sensitive than your fragile beings with nervous temperaments," said Dora. "I have often been struck with Julian's morbid feeling about things which a strong man might be supposed to regard with indifference."

"He is a deuced good fellow," said Bothwell, who had been more generously treated by his cousin's husband than by any of his own clan. "Won't you come for a turn in the garden? I won't start another cigarette, if you object."

"You know I don't mind smoke," she answered, joining him. "Why, how your hand shakes, Bothwell. You can hardly light your cigarette."

"Didn't I say that I was upset by that business? I don't suppose I shall sleep a wink to-night."

They walked in the rose garden for more than an hour. Garden and night were both alike ideal. An Italian garden, with formal terraces, and beds of roses, and a fountain in the center, a bold and plenteous jet that rose from a massive marble basin. Roses, magnolia, jasmine, and Mary lilies filled the air with perfume. The moon had changed from gold to silver, and was high up in the heavens.

It was everybody's moon now, silvering the humble roofs of Bodmin, shining over the church, the jail, the lunatic asylum, and shining on that humble village inn five or six miles away, beneath whose rustic roof the stranger was lying, with none to pray beside her bed or weep upon her pillow.

Bothwell sauntered silently by his cousin's side. She, too, was silent, and felt no inclination to talk or to listen. She was glad to be out in the garden while her husband opened his letters. She knew there was a pile of correspondence waiting for him. Such letters as devour the leisure of a country gentleman of wealth and high standing—letters for the most part uninteresting, and very often troublesome. It would take Julian Wyllard a long time to wade through them all. But when the stable clock struck twelve, Dora thought she might fairly hope to find the task finished.

"Good-night, Bothwell," she said, "I'll go and look for Julian."

The servants had all gone to bed, and the lamps had been extinguished, except in the hall and corridors. A half-glass door opened from the garden into the hall, and this was always left unbolted for the accommodation of Bothwell, who was fond of late saunterings in the grounds. The library was at the further end of the house—a superb room, filled with a choice collection of books, the growth of the last seven years, for Julian Wyllard was a new man in the county, and had only owned Penmorval during that period.

There was a good fire burning in the artistic-tiled grate, a modern improvement upon the old arrangement in wrought iron. Mr. Wyllard had opened all his letters, and had evidently burned some of them, for an odor of calcined paper and sealing-wax pervaded the room.

He was sitting in a low chair beside the hearth, in a stooping attitude, deeply meditative, looking down at some object in his hands.

He was so profoundly absorbed as to be unconscious of Dora's presence till she was standing close behind him.

The object which so engrossed his attention, which had led his thoughts backward to the far-away past, was a long tress of chestnut hair. He had wound it round his fingers—a smooth, silken tress, which flashed with gleams of gold in the light of the cheery fire.

"What beautiful hair," said Dora, gently, as she looked downward from behind his shoulder. "Whose is it, Julian?"

"It *was* my sister's," he answered.

"The sister who died so many years ago. Poor Julian. You have been sitting here alone giving yourself up to sad memories."

"I came upon this auburn tress among some old papers just now, while I was looking for Martin's lease."

He rolled the hair up quickly, and flung it into the flaming coals.

"Oh, Julian, why did you do that?" asked his wife, reproachfully.

"What is the use of keeping such things? It can only perpetuate a sorrowful memory. It is a folly to preserve such a token of the dead. God knows we have enough of our dead. They haunt and plague us at every stage of life. We can not get rid of them."

The bitterness of his tone jarred upon his wife's ear.

"My dearest, you are wearied and out of spirits," she said. "You have worked too long. Were your letters troublesome?"

"Not more so than usual, dear. Yes, I am very tired."

"And that dreadful event on the line has troubled you. Poor Bothwell is quite upset by it. I am so sorry for you, Julian," said his wife, soothingly, leaning upon his shoulder, smoothing back the thick hair from the broad, full brow.

"My dear child, there is no reason to be sorry for me. Dreadful events are happening every day all over the world. We hear of them, and feel how feeble a thing life is under such conditions as those on which we all hold our existence. This evening, I happened to be brought face to face with a terrible death. That is all the difference."

CHAPTER II.

AFTER THE INQUEST.

THERE was a great excitement in Bodmin on the afternoon of the inquest, a delicious summer afternoon, which seemed made for quiet arcadian joys, an afternoon to be spent in day dreams under forest boughs, or drifting lazily a-down a placid stream, rather than for gathering together in a stifling tavern parlor, listening to the droning accents of a police-constable, or the confused statements and innocent prevarications of a railway porter. But it may be that the inhabitants of Bodmin had drunk their fill of the cup of pastoral joys, that they had had more than enough of heathery moorland and foxglove-bordered land, dog-rose and honeysuckle, waving boughs and winding streams. At any rate, they all with one accord flocked to the little inn beyond Bodmin Road Station, and elbowed and hustled one another in the endeavor to get a good view of the coroner and the witnesses.

An inquest was not in itself such a thrilling event. There had been inquests held in Bodmin which inspired neither curiosity nor interest in the mind of the town. But this inquiry of to-day interested everybody. Who could tell what mystery—what story of falsehood and wrong—had gone before that sad, strange death? The report had gone about that the victim was a foreigner, and this gave a deeper note to the mystery. Why had she come to that spot to kill herself, or who had taken her there to murder her? These were the questions which were discussed in Bodmin freely that morning—questions which gave birth to various wise and abstruse theories, every one of which seemed to the inventor thereof a most plausible explanation of this dark problem in human history.

"If anybody can throw light upon the business, Squire Heathcote is the man to do it," said Mr. Bate, grocer, general dealer, and church-warden.

Edward Heathcote was one of the most popular men in the neighborhood. He was a native of the soil, had been known to the neighborhood from his childhood. He came of a race that was held in high honor, which had produced men famous in the arts of war and peace in the days that were gone. Honor, courage, and all generous feelings were supposed to run in the blood of the Heathcotes. He had succeeded to a small estate and a fine old grange, in which his forefathers had lived for generation upon generation. In the deepest night of past ages there had been Heathcotes in the land. Thus, albeit he was by no means a rich man as compared with Julian Wyllard, he stood higher than the wealthy banker in the esteem of those good old Conservatives who held that money is not everything. Mr. Wyllard was a new-comer, had bought Penmorval just before his marriage—choosing this part of the world for his residence because Theodora Dalmaine loved it, rather than from any leaning of his own. He was known to have made the greater part of his money himself—a low thing for a man to have done! Even commercial fortunes become hallowed after they have filtered from father to son for three or four generations. Thus, although he was altogether the most important personage in the neighborhood, and belonged to the landed gentry by right of recent purchase, there were people who looked upon Julian Wyllard as a *parvenu*, and who were somewhat disposed to resent the weight which his wealth gave him in local affairs.

Squire Heathcote was said to be the best coroner who had filled that office at Bodmin within the memory of the oldest inhabitant. His legal experiences had been of a wider range than those of the average provincial solicitor. He had served his articles to a well-known London firm; he had traveled a good deal in his youth, and had seen men and cities. He had been brought into close relations with his fellow men under manifold conditions, and he was said to be a marvelous judge of character, an impartial and clear-headed judge. On more than one occasion he had shown an acumen rarely met with at a rural inquest; and he had disentangled more than one knotted skein. It was argued, therefore, that if any one could unravel the mystery of the dead girl's fate Squire Heathcote was the man to do it.

Nothing could be quieter or less pretentious than his manner as he

took his seat at the head of the long table in the parlor of the Vital Spark; but there were signs of anxiety or emotion in the somber fire of the deep-set gray eyes, and the nervous movement of the sunburnt hand, which played with his dark chestnut beard. He sat for some minutes looking down to his notes, and then slowly raised his eyes and surveyed the room, which was quite full.

Mr. Wyllard was sitting near the opposite end of the table, with little Dr. Menheniot by his side. Bothwell Grahame was seated apart from them and nearer the jury. He had a haggard look, Mr. Heathcote thought, as of a man who had passed a troubled night. There were three or four railway officials present, and these were the principal witnesses. First came the guard on the down train from Paddington, whose evidence was meager, since it appeared that he had only seen the dead girl standing on the foot-board a moment before she fell. She was standing on the foot-board and clinging to the handrail with her face to the coach. That was his impression. It had not seemed to him that she threw herself off the foot-board. It had seemed rather as if she had dropped off.

"Was it your impression that she was thrown off?" asked Heathcote.

"No, sir; I can't say that was my impression. But the whole thing was too quick for me to have a very clear idea either way. My first thought was how I could save her. I had only just stepped out upon the foot-board when she gave a shriek and fell. She was at the further end of the train. Before I could get to the carriage from which she had fallen the engine had slackened and the people were getting out."

"Did you find the carriage out of which she fell?"

"Yes, sir. There was an empty second-class next but one to the engine. I believe that was the compartment. There was a little basket with some refreshments, and a newspaper, which I believe belonged to the deceased."

The basket was on the table. It had a foreign look; a poor little basket, containing a few cherries in a cabbage leaf, and a little bag of biscuits. The newspaper was the French "Figaro." The coroner handed the basket to the jury, who examined the contents curiously. There was no scrap of writing, no card or old letter; nothing to identify the dead girl, or to indicate the place from which she had come.

"Her clothes and the contents of the pockets have been examined," said Mr. Heathcote, in reply to a question from one of the jury, "but no mark or clew has been found. Nor has any luggage belonging to her been discovered, which is curious, since it is not often that any one travels from London to Cornwall without luggage. I have communicated with the London police, and I have sent an advertisement to the 'Times,' and to a Parisian newspaper. Perhaps, by this means we shall discover the girl's identity. In the meantime the question is, How did she come by her death?"

The next witness was a porter from the Plymouth station, who had taken notice of the girl there while the train waited. He had seen her on the platform, alone. He was sure that he had not seen her speak to anybody. She walked up and down the platform two or three times, and he thought she looked puzzled and anxious, as

i. she expected to meet somebody who had not come. He was too busy looking after people's luggage to watch her closely, but he had noticed her because she looked like a foreigner. He saw her get into a second-class compartment near the engine just as the train was starting. She got in hurriedly, and it seemed to him that some one inside the compartment had opened the door for her and helped her in; but he could not be positive about this, as he was a long way off at the time. He had seen the deceased and recognized her as the young person he had observed at Plymouth.

Dr. Menheniot was the next witness. He gave technical evidence as to the cause of the girl's death; but as to the circumstances that preceded her fall he could say no more than the guard. Yes, a little more, for he had seen the carriage door opened and the girl stepping out on the hand-rail. Yes; in answer to the coroner's question, it had seemed to him that some one thrust her out, yet he could not swear that it was so. The door had opened suddenly; and he had seen her standing on the foot-board, clinging to the open door. If she had meant to commit suicide it appeared to him that she would have leaped at once from the carriage over the embankment. The act of standing on the foot-board and clinging to the carriage would imply resistance.

"It might mean only hesitation," said Heathcote. "How long do you suppose she remained standing on the foot-board?"

"Hardly a minute—perhaps not more than thirty seconds. I heard the guard signal for the stopping of the train and then her shriek as she fell. It was almost instantaneous. The engine was just on the bridge when I first saw her. It was in the middle of the bridge when she fell. That will give you the best idea as to time."

"Not more than thirty seconds," said the coroner, who knew every yard of the line. "Is there any one else here who can tell us anything about this poor girl's death?"

There was no one else, though there were twenty people in the room who had been in the same train, and had gone down into the gorge to see that poor crushed form lying amid ferns and fox-gloves, to look curiously at the small white face, the childish lips forever mute in death. No one could tell any more, or indeed as much, about the details of the catastrophe as Dr. Menheniot and the guard, both of whom had seen the fall; whereas no one else happened to have been looking out of window on the near side of the train.

"We will adjourn the inquest for a fortnight," said Mr. Heathcote, presently, after a whispered consultation with the jury. "The matter is much too mysterious to be dismissed without a very careful investigation. A fortnight will give ample time for the friends of the deceased to come forward. I have ordered photographs to be taken, with a view to her identification. Burial can not, of course, be delayed beyond the usual time."

There were morbid minds among the spectators who envied the photographer his ghastly office. The inquest was felt to have been disappointing. Revelations had been expected, and none had come. But Mr. Heathcote had pronounced the case deeply mysterious; and there was comfort in the idea that he might know more than he cared to reveal yet awhile.

Julian Wyllard had driven from Penmorval in his own particular dog-cart, with one of the finest horses in the district. Bothwell Grahame, who was a great walker and altogether independent in his habits, had come across the hills, and over corn-fields and meadows as straight as the crow flies. The master of Penmorval's smart trap and high-stepping gray were out of sight before Bothwell left the pathway in front of the Vital Spark, where he lingered to talk over the inquest with some of his Bodmin acquaintances. The young Scotchman was steeped to the eyes in true Caledonian pride of race, but he had none of that petty pride which makes a man scornful of that portion of the human race which earns its bread by humble avocations. He was as friendly with a railway porter or a village tradesman as with the proudest land-owner in the county, had not two sets of manners for high and low, or two distinct modes of speech for gentle and simple—the very intonation different for that interior clay. Bothwell had never been able to understand why some of the men he knew talked to a tradesman or a servant just as they would have spoken to a dog; or, indeed, much less civilly than Bothwell spoke to his dogs. He was a stanch Conservative in most things, but in this one question of respect for his fellow-man he was an unmitigated Radical.

And now he loitered in front of the inn door, talking to the railway officials who had appeared at the inquest, and who knew Mr. Grahame as a frequent traveler between Bodmin Road and Plymouth.

"There was one thing that didn't come out just now," said the station-master, "and that was the girl's ticket. The ticket was for Plymouth, and yet here was this poor young thing going on toward Penzance. Why was she going beyond her first destination, eh, Mr. Grahame? Why did she walk up and down the platform at Plymouth as if she expected some one to meet her there? Why did she get into the train at the last moment, just as it was moving out of the station? Don't it seem likely that the individual who was to have met her in the station for which she had taken her ticket was the same individual that helped her into the train, and that he made away with her? A husband, perhaps, who wanted to get rid of a troublesome foreign wife. And he tells her to meet him at Plymouth, and he is there to meet her, but not on the platform as she expects. He is there in hiding in a railway carriage, and he beckons her in just as the train is starting, when he is least likely to be observed in the bustle and hurry of the start!"

"You put your story together very well, Mr. Chafy," said Bothwell, somewhat indifferently, as if not deeply interested in this mystery which so inthralled the Bodmin mind. "You ought to have been a detective. But if this poor girl was murdered, and her murderer was in the train, how is it that you who are so sharp could not contrive to spot him when you took stock of the passengers? Mr. Wyllard gave you the office, I remember."

"Murderers do not carry the brand of Cain, Mr. Grahame," said Edward Heathcote, who had come out of the inn door in time to hear Bothwell's speech. "The assassins of our civilized era are high-handed gentlemen, very cunning of fence, and have no more mark upon them than you or I."

"I believe the girl's death was an accident," said Bothwell, with a touch of impatience; "one of those profound mysteries which are as simple as A B C. She may have been standing by the door admiring the landscape, and the door may have opened as she leaned against it. She might recover herself so far as to hold on to the foot-board for a few seconds, clinging to the hand-rail, and then she fell and was killed."

"Not a very plausible explanation, my dear Grahame. She was leaning against the door, looking out at the landscape, you suggest, and the door opened and let her out. How was it, then, that when Menheniot and the guard saw her she was standing on the foot-board with her face to the carriage? Did she swing herself round on the foot-board, as on a pivot, do you suppose? Rather a difficult achievement, even for an acrobat."

"You need not be so deuced clever," retorted Bothwell, who seemed altogether out of sorts this afternoon. "It is not my business to find out how the young woman came by her death."

"No," said the coroner, "but it is mine, and I mean to do it."

"It won't be the first queer case you've got to the bottom of, Mr. Heathcote," said the station-master, in a tone of respect that amounted almost to reverence. "You remember poor old Uncle Taylor, who was found dead at the bottom of the Merrytree shaft over to Truro? You put a rope round the neck of the scoundrel who killed him, you did. There's not many men clever enough to keep a secret from you."

"Good-night, squire; good-night, Chafy," said Bothwell moving off.

Edward Heathcote followed him.

"If you are walking home, I'll go part of the way with you," he said.

"What! are you on foot?" asked Bothwell, surprised. "What has become of Timour?"

"Timour is in a barn, with his shoes off, getting ready for the cub-hunting."

"And the rest of your stud?"

"I have plenty of horses to ride, if that is what you mean; but I rather prefer walking, in such weather as this. How is it you did not drive home in your cousin's dog-cart?"

"I hate sitting beside another man to be driven," said Bothwell, shortly. "There are times, too, when a fellow likes to be alone."

If this were intended for a hint Mr. Heathcote did not take it. He produced his cigar-case and offered Bothwell one of his Partagas. He was a great smoker, and renowned for smoking good tobacco, so Bothwell accepted the cigar and lighted it, but did not relax the sullen air which he had assumed when Mr. Heathcote volunteered his company.

"You are not looking over well this afternoon, Grahame," said Heathcote, when they had walked a little way, silently smoking their cigars.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with me," the young man answered, carelessly. "I was up late, and I had a bad night, that's all."

"You were troubled about yesterday's business," suggested the coroner.

"The girl's dead face haunted me; but I had troubles of my own without that."

"You must have seen a good many dead faces in India?"

"Yes, I have seen plenty—black and white—but there are some things against which a man can not harden himself, and sudden death is one of them."

He relapsed into silence, and Heathcote and he walked side by side for some time without a word, the lawyer contemplating the soldier, studying him as if he had been a difficult page in a book. Edward Heathcote had spent a good deal of his life in studying living books of this kind. His practice in Plymouth had been of a very special character; he had been trusted in delicate matters, had held the honor of noble families in his keeping, had come between father and son, husband and wife; had been guide, philosopher, and friend, as well as legal adviser. His reputation for fine feeling and high moral character, the fact of his good birth and ample means, had made him the chosen repository of many a family secret which would have been trusted to very few solicitors. His name in Plymouth was a synonym for honor, and his advice, shrewd lawyer though he was, always leaned to the side of chivalrous feeling rather than to bare justice.

Such a man must have had ample occasion for the study of human nature under strange aspects. It was, therefore, a highly-trained intellect which was now brought to bear upon Bothwell Grahame, as he walked silently beside the flowering hedgerows in that quiet Cornish lane, puffing at his cigar, and looking straight before him into vacancy.

Mr. Heathcote had seen a good deal of Captain Grahame during the year he had lived at Penmorval; but he never had seen such a look of care as he saw in the soldier's face to-day. Trouble of some kind—and of no light or trifling kind—was gnawing the man's breast. Of that fact Edward Heathcote was assured; and there was a strange sinking at his own heart as he speculated upon the nature of that secret trouble which Bothwell was trying his best to hide under a show of somewhat sullen indifference.

As coroner and as lawyer, Mr. Heathcote had made up his mind more than an hour ago that the girl lying at the Vital Spark had been murdered. She had been thrust out of the railway carriage, flung over the line into that dreadful gulf, by some person who wanted to make away with her. Her murderer was to be looked for in the train; had traveled in one of those carriages; had been one among those seemingly innocent travelers, all professing a like ignorance of the girl's identity. One among those three-and-twenty people whom Chafy, the station-master, had counted and taken stock of at Bodmin Road Station, must needs be the murderer. That one, whoever he was, had borne himself so well as to baffle the station-master's scrutiny. He had shown no trace of remorse, agitation, guilty fear. He had borne himself at all points as an innocent man.

But what if the criminal were one whom the station-master knew

and respected—a man of mark and standing in the neighborhood, whose very name disarmed suspicion?

Such a man would have passed out of the station unobserved; or, if any signs of agitation were noted in his manner, that emotion would be put down to kindly feeling, the natural pity of a benevolent mind. Had any hard-handed son of toil—a stranger in the land, reaper, miner, sea-faring man—had such a one as this exhibited signs of discomposure, suspicion would at once have been on the alert. But who could suspect Mrs. Wyllard's soldier cousin—the idle, open handed gentleman, who had made himself everybody's favorite?

It would have been a wild speculation to suppose, because Bothwell's countenance and manner were so charged with secret trouble, that his was the arm which thrust that poor girl to her untimely death. Yet the coroner found himself dwelling upon this wild fancy, painful as it was to him to harbor any evil thought of Dora Wyllard's cousin.

There were several points which forced themselves upon his consideration—as it were, in spite of himself. First, Bothwell's changed manner to-day—his avowal of a troubled night—his evident wish to be alone—his incivility, as of one whose mind was set on edge by painful thoughts. Then came the fact of his journey to Plymouth on that day—a journey undertaken suddenly, without any explanation offered to his cousin—a seemingly purposeless trip, since he had given no reason for absenting himself, stated no business in the town. He had gone and returned within a few hours, and his journey had been a surprise to his cousin and her husband. Thirdly, there was his clumsy attempt to explain the girl's death just now, in front of the inn door; his unwillingness to admit the idea of foul play. He who excuses himself accuses himself, says the proverb. Bothwell had tried to account for the catastrophe on the line, and in so doing had awakened the coroner's suspicions.

After all, these links in a chain of evidence were of the slightest; but Edward Heathcote had set himself to unravel the mystery of the nameless dead, and he was determined not to overlook the slenderest thread in the web of that dark secret.

"Your cousin, Mr. Wyllard, seemed to have quite recovered from the shock of yesterday evening," he said, presently. "I never saw him looking better than he looked this afternoon."

"Wyllard is a man made of iron," answered Bothwell, carelessly. "I sometimes think there is only one soft spot in his heart, and that is his love for my cousin. In that he is distinctly human. I never saw a more devoted husband. I never knew a happier couple."

Bothwell sighed, as if this mention of the happiness of others recalled the thought of his own misery. At least it was thus that Edward Heathcote interpreted the sigh.

Completely absorbed in his own cares, Bothwell had forgotten for the moment that he was talking to the man whom his cousin had jilted in order to marry Julian Wyllard. The courtship and the marriage had happened while Bothwell was in the East. It had never been more to him than a tradition, and the tradition was not in his mind when he talked of his cousin's wedded happiness.

"I am glad that it is so—very glad," said Edward Heathcote, earnestly.

He spoke in all good faith. He had loved with so unselfish a love that the welfare of his idol had been ever of more account to him than his own bliss. He had renounced her without a struggle, since her happiness demanded the sacrifice. And she was happy. That was the grand point. He had paid the price, and he had won the reward. He had loved with all his heart and strength. He had never ceased so to love. That wedded life, which to the outside world seemed a life of quiet domestic happiness, had been on his part only a life of resignation. He had married a friendless, penniless girl who loved him—who had betrayed the secret of her love for him unawares, in very innocence of inexperienced girlhood. He had taken a helpless girl to his heart and home, because there seemed, upon this earth, no other available shelter for her; and he had done his utmost for her happiness. He had succeeded so well that she never knew that this thoughtful kindness, which wrapped round her as with a balmy atmosphere, this boundless benevolence which shone upon her like the sun, was not love. She was one of the happiest of women, and one of the proudest wives in the west country, and she died blessing him who had made her life blessed.

And now the gossips were all full of pity for the widower's loss and loneliness—a poor bereaved creature living in a lonely old Grange, with a young sister, the twin daughters, just four years old, and an ancient maiden lady who looked after the sister, the children the house, and the servants; and in her own person represented the genius of thrift, propriety, prudence, wisdom, and all the domestic virtues. People in the neighborhood of Bodmin, and his old friends at Plymouth, all thought and talked of Mr. Heathcote as borne down by the weight of his bereavement, and all hoped that he would soon marry again.

The Spaniards lay in a valley between Bodmin Road Station and Penmorval. It lay on Bothwell's road to his cousin's house, and he had thus no excuse for parting company with the coroner, had he been so inclined. The old wrought-iron gate between gray granite pillars, each crowned with the escutcheon of the Heathcotes, stood wide open, and the snug rose and myrtle-curtained cottage by the gate had as sleepy an air in the summer evening as if it had been a lodge at the gate of the Sleeping Beauty's enchanted domain. Even the old trees, the great Spanish chestnuts with their masses of foliage, had a look of having outgrown all reason in a century of repose. No prodigal son had laid the spendthrift's ax to the good old trees around the birthplace of the Heathcotes. There was only the extent of a wide paddock and a lawn between the hall door and that grand old gateway, and the house, though substantial and capacious, hardly pretended to the dignity of a mansion. It was long and low and rambling—a house of many small rooms, queer winding passages, innumerable doors and windows, and low, heavily-timbered ceilings, a house in which strange visitors and their servants were given to seeing ghosts and hearing unearthly noises of gloomy and funereal significance—albeit, the family had jogged on quietly enough from generation to generation without any interference from the spirit world. People coming from brand-new houses in Earl's Court or Turnham Green protested that the Spaniards *must* be haunted; and shuddered every time the mice scampered be-

hind the paneling or the wind sighed amidst the branches of those leafy towers that girdled lawn and meadow.

Bothwell thought that Heathcote would leave him at the gate of the Spaniards.

"Good-night," he said, somewhat shortly.

"I'll go on to Penmorval with you, and hear what impression the inquest made upon Wyllard," said the other. "It's not half past seven yet—your cousin will be able to spare me a few minutes before dinner."

Bothwell walked on without a word. Ten minutes brought them to the gates of Penmorval, by far the lordlier domain, with a history that involved noblest traditions. But that ancient race for which Penmorval had been built, for whose sons and daughters it had grown in grandeur and dignity as the centuries rolled along—of *these* there remained no more than the echo of a vanished renown—they were gone, verily like a tale that is told, and the *parvenu* banker, the man who had grown rich by his own intellect and his own industry—naturally a very inferior personage—reigned in their stead.

Penmorval seemed not quite so dead asleep as Heathcote Grange, *alias* the Spaniards. In the sweet stillness of the summer evening, Bothwell and his companion heard voices—women's voices—familiar and pleasant to the ears of both.

Mrs. Wyllard was strolling in the avenue with a young lady by her side, a girl in a white gown and a large leghorn hat; tall, slight, graceful of form, and fair of face—a girl who gave a little cry of pleased surprise at seeing Heathcote.

"I was just rushing home, Edward," she said, "for fear I should keep you waiting for dinner."

"Indeed, Hilda. Then I can only say that your idea of rushing is my idea of sauntering," her brother answered, smiling at the girlish face as he shook hands with Mrs. Wyllard.

"What did Mr. Wyllard think of the inquest?" he asked. "You have seen him, I suppose?"

"Only for a minute as he drove by to the house, while Hilda and I were walking in the avenue. Why, Bothwell, how fagged and ill you look," exclaimed Mrs. Wyllard, looking at her cousin.

"Only bored," answered Bothwell, which was not complimentary to the companion of his long walk.

"But you look positively exhausted, poor fellow," pursued Dora, pityingly. "Why didn't you come back in the dog-cart? There was room for you."

"I wanted to be alone."

"And I wanted company," said Heathcote, laughing: "so I inflicted my society upon an unwilling companion. Very bad manners, no doubt."

"I am afraid you got the worst of the bargain," muttered Bothwell, with a sullen look, at which Hilda's blue eyes opened wide with wonder.

"Do you know, Mr. Heathcote, an idle life does not agree with my cousin," said Dora. "I never know what it is to be weary of Penmorval or the country round, but for the last three or four weeks Bothwell has behaved as if he hated the place, and could find

neither rest nor amusement within twenty miles of us. He is perpetually moving off to Plymouth or to London."

"I wish women would take to reading their dictionaries instead of cramming their heads with other women's novels," exclaimed Bothwell, savagely, "for then, perhaps, they might have some idea of the meaning of words. When you say I run up to London perpetually, Dora, I suppose you mean that I have been there twice—on urgent business, by the way—within the last five weeks."

"And to Plymouth at least a dozen times," protested Dora. "All I can say is that you are my idea of perpetual motion."

"I know you are hardly ever at home, Mr. Grahame," said Hilda, backing up her friend.

They strolled toward the house as they talked, and half way along the avenue they met the master of Penmorval, correctly attired in sober evening dress, with a light overcoat worn loosely above his faultless black.

"How do you do, Heathcote? Do you know, Dora, that it is ten minutes to eight? You'll stop and dine with us, of course," added Julian Wyllard, cordially. "You refused last night, but now Hilda is here, and you have no excuse for going home."

"I only came to afternoon tea," said Hilda.

"And you and my wife have been gossiping from five o'clock until now. Deepest mystery of social life, what two women can find to talk about for three mortal hours in the depth of a rural seclusion like this!"

"A mystery to a man, who can not imagine that women either think or read," retorted Dora, taking her husband's arm. "You men have a fixed idea that your wives and sisters have only two subjects of conversation, gowns and servants. Of course you will stay and dine, Mr. Heathcote. I am not going to dress for dinner, so please don't look at your frock-coat as if that were an insuperable obstacle. You and Hilda are going to stop, whether you like it or not."

"You know we always like to be here," said Hilda, in her low, sweet voice.

She stole a little shy look at Bothwell, as if wondering what he thought of the matter; but Bothwell's countenance was inscrutable.

Hilda was pained but not surprised by his manner. He had changed to her so strangely within the last few months—he who half a year ago had been so kind, so attentive. She was not angry—she was not vain enough to wonder that a man should begin by caring for her a little, and then leave off caring all at once, and relapse into absolute indifference. She supposed that such fickleness was a common attribute of the superior sex.

They all went to the house, and through a glass door into the large low drawing room, where the butler immediately announced dinner. The two ladies had only time to take off their hats before they went into the dining-room. They were both in white, and there was a grace in Dora Wyllard's simple gown, a cluster of roses half hidden by the folds of an Indian muslin fichu, a swan-like throat rising from a haze of delicate lace, which was more attractive than the costliest toilet ever imported from Paris to be the wonder of a court ball. Yes, she was still, of all women Edward Heath-

cote had ever known, the most gracious, the most beautiful. Those seven years of a happy, married life had ripened her beauty, had given a shade of thoughtfulness to the matron's dark eyes, the low, wide brow, the perfect mouth, but had not robbed the noble countenance of a single charm. The face of the wife was nobler than the face of the girl. It was the face of a woman who lived for another rather than for her own happiness, the face of a woman superior to all feminine frivolity, and yet in all things most womanly.

Edward Heathcote sighed within himself as he took his place beside his hostess in the subdued light of the old paneled room, a warm light from lamps that hung low on the table, under rose-colored shades, umbrella shaped, spreading a luminous glow over silver and glass and flowers, and leaving the faces of the guests somewhat in shadow. He sighed as he thought how sweet life would have been for him had this woman remained true to her first love. For she had loved him once. Eight years ago they two had clasped hands, touched lips, as affianced lovers. He could never forget what she had been to him, or what she might have been. He sat at her husband's table in all loyalty of soul, in stanch friendship. He would have cut his heart out rather than debase himself or Dora by one guilty thought. Yet he could but remember these things had been.

The two ladies left almost immediately after dinner, and Bothwell sauntered out into the garden directly afterward. Not to rejoin them, as he would have done a few months ago, but to smoke the cigar of solitude in a walk beside a crumbling old red wall, and a long narrow border of hollyhocks, tall, gigantic, yellow, and crimson, and white, and pink. There were fruit trees on the other side of the wall, which was supported with tremendous buttresses at intervals of twenty feet or so, and about wall and buttresses climbed clematis and passion flower, jasmine, yellow and white, and the great crimson trumpets of the bigonia.

The banker and the lawyer sat silently for a few minutes, Julian Wyllard occupied in the choice of a cigar from a case which he had first offered to his guest, and then Edward Heathcote asked him what he thought of the inquest.

"I thought it altogether unsatisfactory," answered Wyllard. "You did your best to thrash out a few facts, but those fools of railway people had nothing to tell worth hearing. Everybody knows that the poor creature fell off the train—or was thrown off. What we want to find out is whether there was foul play in the business."

"It is my belief that there was," said Heathcote, looking at him fixedly in the dim, difficult light, almost as unsatisfactory for such a scrutiny as the changeful glow of the fire.

"And mine," answered the banker, "and so strong is my conviction upon this point that I stopped at the post-office on my way home and telegraphed to my old friend George Distin, asking him to come down and help us to solve the mystery."

"Do you mean the famous criminal lawyer?"

"Whom else should I mean? He and I were school-fellows. I

have asked him to stop at Penmorval while he carries on his investigation."

CHAPTER III.

GEORGE DISTIN

MRS. WYLLARD was surprised and even horrified when on the morning after the inquest, her husband told her that he had invited Mr. Distin, the criminal lawyer, to stay at Penmorval, while he investigated this mystery of the nameless girl's death. The presence of such a man beneath her roof seemed to her like a pollution of that happy home.

"My dear Dora, what a delightful embodiment of provincial simplicity you show yourself in this business," said her husband, laughingly. "I believe you confound the lawyer who practices in the criminal courts with the police agent you have read about in French novels. A man of low birth and education, with nothing but his native wit to recommend him—a man whose chief talent is for disguises, and who passes his life in a false beard and eyebrows, in the company of thieves and murderers whom it is his business to make friends with and then betray. George Distin is a solicitor of long standing, whose chief practice happens to be in the Old Bailey. He is a most accomplished gentleman and the friend of princes."

"He is your friend, Julian, so I ought not for a moment to have doubted that he is a gentleman," answered Dora, sweetly, with her hand resting on her husband's shoulder. Such a lovely hand, with long, tapering fingers, and dimples where other people have knuckles, like a hand in an old Bolognese picture. "Still, I wish with all my heart that he were going to stay at the hotel. I don't want you to be involved in this terrible business. Why should you concern yourself about it, Julian? Nothing you can do can be of use to the poor dead girl. What is it all to you? What have you to do with it?"

"My duty," answered Wyllard, firmly. "As a magistrate I am bound to see that a terrible crime—if crime it be—shall not go unpunished in my district. I have no particular aptitude in unraveling mysteries. I therefore send for my old school-fellow, who has won his reputation among the sinuous ways of crime."

"Ah, I remember. You and Mr. Distin were together at Marlborough," said Dora, musingly. "That is enough to make him an interesting person in my mind."

"Yes, we were companions and rivals, in the same form," answered Julian. "There were some who thought us two the sharpest lads in the school. In all our studies we were neck and neck; but in other points the difference between us was a wide one. Distin was the son of a rich London solicitor, an only son, who could draw upon an indulgent father for means to gratify every whim, who had his clothes made by a fashionable tailor, and could afford to hire a hunter whenever he got the chance of riding one. I was one of many children—the fourth son of a Warwickshire parson, so I had to reckon my cash by sixpences, and to wear my clothes till they

were threadbare. Yes, there was an awful gulf between Distin and me in those days—the impassable abyss that yawns between wealth and poverty."

"And now you must be a great deal richer than he, and you can receive him in this lovely old place."

"There will be some pride in that. Yes, Dora, fortune was at home to me when I knocked at her door. I have been what is called a lucky man."

"And you are a happy one, I hope," murmured his wife, nestling her head in his breast, as he stood before the open window, looking dreamily out at summer woods.

"Ineffably happy, sweet one, in having won you," he answered, tenderly, kissing the fair broad brow.

"You must have been wonderfully clever," said Dora, enthusiastically, "beginning without any capital, and within five-and-twenty years making yourself the head of a great banking house."

"I was fortunate in my enterprises when I was a young man, and I lived at a time when fortunes were made—and lost—rapidly. I may have had a longer head than some of my compeers; at any rate, I was cooler-headed than the majority of them, and I kept out of rotten schemes."

"Or got out of them before they collapsed," perhaps Mr. Wyllard might have said, had he displayed an exhaustive candor.

But in talking of business matters to a woman, a man is apt to keep something in the background.

So after a good deal more discursive talk between husband and wife, it was agreed that Mr. Distin's visit was not to be regarded as an affliction. A telegram arrived while Mr. and Mrs. Wyllard were talking, announcing the lawyer's arrival by the same train which had carried the nameless waif to her grave in the valley, the train arriving at Bodmin Road at a quarter before eight. The dog-cart was to meet the guest, and dinner was to be deferred till nine o'clock for his accommodation.

"You can send a line to Heathcote and ask him to dine with us to-night," said Wyllard. "I know he is desperately interested in the business, and would like to meet Distin."

"And Hilda—you won't mind having Hilda?"

"Not in the least. Hilda is an ornament to any gentleman's table But how fond you have become of Hilda lately!"

"I was always fond of her. Do you know, there is something that puzzles me very much?"

"Indeed."

"A few months ago I thought Bothwell was in love with Hilda. He seemed devoted to her, and was always asking me to have her over here. I was rejoicing at the idea of the poor fellow getting such a sweet girl for his wife, for I thought Hilda rather liked him, when all at once he cooled, and appeared actually to go out of the way in order to avoid her. Strange, was it not?"

"The fickleness of an idle mind, no doubt," answered Wyllard, carelessly.

He had not his wife's keen interest in the joys and sorrows of other people. He was said to be a kind-hearted man. He was good to the poor in a large way, and never drew his purse-strings against

the appeal of misfortune. But he could not be worried about the details of other people's lives. He did not care a straw whether Bothwell was or was not in love with Hilda. To his wife, on the contrary, the question was vital, involving the happiness of two people whom she loved.

"If your cousin does not put his shoulder to the wheel before long, he will fall into a very bad way," said Wyllard, decisively.

"He would be very glad to do it, if he only knew what wheel to shoulder," said Bothwell's voice outside, as he sauntered to the window, wafting aside the pale smoke of his cigarette.

It seemed to Dora as if her cousin spent his home life in smoking cigarettes and sauntering in the gardens, where, on his energetic days, he helped her in her war of extermination against the greenfly.

"There is always a wheel to be moved by the man who is not afraid of work," said Wyllard.

"So I am told, but I have found no such wheel, as a civilian. Seriously, Julian, I know that I am an idler and a reprobate—that I am taking advantage of your kindness and letting life slip by me, just because I have the run of my teeth in this fine old place, and because you and Dora are worlds too good to me. I have been taking my own character between my teeth and giving it a good shaking within the last few days, and I mean to turn over a new leaf. I shall go abroad—to the South Seas."

"What are you to do for a living in the South Seas?"

"Something. Sub-edit a colonial paper—keep a grocery store—turn parson and convert the nigger. I shall fall upon my feet, you may be sure. I shall find something to do before I have been out there long. Or, if the Otaheite won't give me a roof and a crust, I can cross to the mainland and drive sheep. Something I must do for my bread—into the new world I must go. The atmosphere of the old world is stifling me. I feel as if I was living in an orchid house."

"No, Bothwell, you are not going to the other end of the world," said Dora, affectionately. "You ought not to say such things, Julian, making him feel as if he were an intruder, as if he were not welcome here—my first cousin—the only companion of my youth that remains to me now my dear mother is gone. Surely we who are rich need not grudge our kinsman a home."

"My dearest, you ought to know that I spoke for Bothwell's sake, and from no other motive than my care for his interest," answered Julian, gravely. "A young man without a profession is a young man on the big road to perdition."

"I believe you with all my soul," cried Bothwell, with feverish energy, "and I shall sail for Otaheite in the first ship that will carry me. Not because I do not love you, Dora, but because I want to be worthier of your love."

He lighted a fresh cigarette, and sauntered away from the window, to breath latakia over the John Hoppers and Victor Verdiers on the wall.

Dora's eyes filled with tears. She was angrier with her husband than she had ever been since her marriage.

"It is very unkind of you to drive Bothwell out of your house,"

she said, passionately. "You make me regret that I have not a house of my own. You forget how fond we have always been of each other—that he is as dear to me as a brother."

"It is because I remember that fact that I am anxious to stimulate Bothwell to action of some kind," answered her husband. "Do you think it is good for any young man to lead the kind of life your cousin leads here?"

"If he were to marry, he would become more industrious, I have no doubt," said Dora. "You might pension off old Mr. Gretton, and make Bothwell your land-steward."

"Which in Bothwell's case would mean a genteel dependence, under the disguise of a responsible position. Bothwell would be seen on every race-course in the west country, would play billiards at the George, shoot my game, and let somebody else do my work."

"Do you mean that my cousin is a dishonorable man?" asked Dora, indignantly.

"No, dear. I mean that he is a man who has spoiled one career for himself, and will have to work uncommonly hard in order to find another."

This was cruel logic to Dora's ears. For the first time in her life she thought that her husband was ungenerous; and for the first time in her life she reckoned her own fortune as an element of power. Hitherto she had allowed her rents to be paid into her husband's bank. She had her own check-book, and drew whatever money she wanted; but she did not even ask what income each year brought her, or what surplus was left at the end of the year. She had never offered to help Bothwell with money. She had felt that any such offer would humiliate him. But now she considered for the first time that her money must have accumulated to a considerable extent in her husband's bank, and that it was in her power to assist Bothwell with capital for any enterprise which he might desire to undertake. If he had set his heart upon going to the South Sea Islands, he would not start with an empty purse.

The train from Paddington came into Bodmin Road Station with laudable punctuality, and without mischance of any kind, and the dog-cart brought Mr. Distin to Penmorval before half-past eight. Dora was in the drawing-room when he arrived. She had dressed early in order to be on the spot to welcome her husband's friend, even albeit he came to her with a perfume of the Old Bailey.

In spite of Mr. Wyllard's praise of his old schoolfellow, Dora had expected a foxy and unpleasant individual, with craft in every feature of his face.

She was agreeably surprised on beholding a good-looking man of refined type, with aquiline nose, dark eyes, hair and whiskers inclining to gray, slim, well set up, neat without being dapper or priggish—a man who might have been taken for an artist or an author just as readily as for a lawyer versed in the dark ways of crime.

"My friend Wyllard looks all the better for his rural seclusion," said Distin, after he had been introduced to Dora. "He seems to me a younger man by ten years than he was when I met him in Paris, just ten years ago. And that means twenty years to the good, you see."

"Is it really ten years since you have met?" exclaimed Dora.

"Exactly a decade. Our last meeting was a chance encounter in the Palais Royal, where we ran against each other one day at dinner-time—both making for Véfour's, where we dined together, and talked over old times. I thought that evening my friend looked aged and haggard, nervous and worried, and I put it down to the ruling disease of our epoch, high-pressure. But now I find him regenerated, glorified by country life. Happy fellow, who can afford to enjoy his *otium cum dignitate* in the very prime of life."

"You hear what he says, Dora," said Wyllard, laughingly. "Now, I dare say what he thinks is: 'How can this poor devil endure his existence out of London—two hundred miles from the clubs—from the opera house—from the first nights of new plays—the crowd of familiar faces?' I know my friend Distin of old, and that he could not go on breathing out of London any more than a fish can live out of water."

"I like my little London," admitted Distin coyly, almost as if he were talking of a fascinating woman. "There's so much in it, and it's such a devilish wicked place, to those who really know it. But I think the country a most delightful institution from Saturday to Monday."

"The cockney stands confessed in that one remark," said Wyllard, laughing.

"That is the worst of Devonshire and Cornwall," pursued Distin in his airy way. "Charming scenery—eminently picturesque. But too far off to be done from Saturday to Monday. But there is one ineffable charm in those pretty places up the river, and those rustic villages in Kent."

"Pray what is that?"

"One is always so delighted to arrive on Saturday afternoon, and so charmed to leave on Monday morning. The rustic aroma just lasts till Sunday night, and the keen craving for town begins with the dawn of Monday. But I must go and get rid of two hundred miles of dust," said Mr. Distin, slipping off as lightly as a boy.

He left the drawing-room at twenty minutes to nine, and returned at five minutes before the hour in full evening dress. It was almost like a conjuring trick. His costume was of the quietest, yet there was a finish and style about everything that impressed even the ignorant. One felt that the very latest impress of Fashion's fair fingers had touched that shirt, had meted out the depth of the silk collar, the curve of the sleeve. That black pearl center-stud might have been the last gift of a prince, or a high-bred woman. One ring, and one only, adorned the solicitor's left hand, but that ring was a table diamond, two hundred and forty years old, said to have been given by Anne of Austria to the Duke of Buckingham.

Bothwell, who took some pride in his clothes, looked clumsy and unfashionable beside the London lawyer, or at any rate fancied that he did. Edward Heathcote was at all times a careless dresser, but his tall figure, and a certain dash which was more soldierly than civilian, made him an important personage in every circle. He had the free grace, the easy movements, of a man who had spent his boyhood and youth out-of-doors—hunting, shooting, fishing, mountaineering.

The dinner was lively, thanks chiefly to George Distin, for Bothwell had a dispirited air, and Hilda could not help feeling unhappy at seeing his gloom, though she tried to conceal her sympathy. Mr. Wyllard and Mr. Distin had the conversation to themselves during the greater part of the meal, for Mr. Heathcote was graver and more reserved than usual, and Dora had a subdued and thoughtful air. She would have been quite ready to admit that George Distin was a very agreeable person, and altogether worthy of her husband's friendship, but she could not dissociate him from the horror of the event which had caused his presence in that house. She felt that of those gathered around her table that night, in the shaded light of the low lamps, amidst the perfume of the hot-house flowers, the greater number were brooding upon a mystery which might mean murder.

She was very glad to escape to the drawing-room with Hilda directly dinner was over.

"And now, I suppose, they will talk of that poor creature's death," she said. "Come, Hilda, sing one of your Schubert songs, and let us try and forget all that horror."

Hilda seated herself at the piano obediently and began "Mignon." She had a lovely mezzo-soprano, clear as a bell, ripe, and round, and full. The rich notes went pealing up to the low ceiling and floated out at the open windows. Perhaps Bothwell heard them in the dining-room, for he came sauntering in presently, and slipped quietly into a seat in the most shadowy corner of the room. Hilda always sung and played from memory. There was no duty to be done in the way of turning over music.

"What made you desert the gentlemen, Bothwell?" asked Mrs. Wyllard, when the song was over.

"They were talking of that diabolical inquest again. Nobody in Bodmin seems able to talk of anything else. Wherever I went today I heard the same ghastly talk—every imaginable suggestion, and not one grain of common sense. What ghouls people must be to gloat over such a subject. No wonder that men who live in great cities despise the rustic mind."

"I do not find that the inhabitants of cities are any less ghoulish," retorted Dora, who felt warmly about her native soil, and would have fought for Cornish people and Cornish institutions to the death. "See how the London papers gloat over the details of a murder."

These three spent the evening very quietly in the drawing-room, while the three men in the dining-room were discussing the event on the railway.

Hilda sung three or four of Mrs. Wyllard's favorite songs, while her hostess sat in the lamplight by an open window working at a group of monster sunflowers on a ground of olive plush. Bothwell kept in his shadowy corner all the evening, so quiet that he might have been asleep, save that he murmured a "Thank you, Miss Heathcote, very lovely," after one of Hilda's songs. She thought that he was only grateful for having had his slumbers soothed by a vague strain of melody.

The men in the dining-room had turned away from the lighted table, and were sitting in a little knot in the embrasure of the wide

Tudor window, smoking their cigars, half in the ruddy glow of the lamps and half in the mellow light of the newly-risen moon. They could hardly see each other's faces in that uncertain light. Stodden, the butler, had wheeled a table over to the window and arranged the claret-jugs and glasses upon it before he left the room. The little knot of men smoking and drinking by the window looked a picture of comfort, with the soft sweet air blowing in from the garden, and the great full moon shining over the roses, and the fountain in the old-fashioned Italian *parterre*. George Distin's keen eye noted every detail of his friend's surroundings, and he told himself that, for the fourth son of a village vicar, Julian Wyllard had done remarkably well.

Between them Wyllard and the coroner had contrived to put the London lawyer in full possession of the facts relating to the girl's death. Those facts were unfortunately of the scantiest. Edward Heathcote breathed no hint of that dark suspicion about Bothwell which had flashed into his mind after the inquest, and which he had vainly endeavored to shake off since that time. Bothwell's manner at dinner this evening had not been calculated to disarm suspicion. His moody brow, his silence and abstraction, were the unmistakable signs of secret trouble of some kind. That trouble was coincidental in time with the event of the railway: for Heathcote and Bothwell had met in Bodmin, and had ridden home together on the previous day, and the young man had been cheery enough.

"The ticket found upon the girl was from London to Plymouth, I apprehend?" said Mr. Distin, when he had heard everything.

"Yes."

"Then she started from Paddington that morning. My business will be to find out who she was, and the motive of her journey."

"And do you think there is a possibility of tracing her in London—without a shred of evidence—except the photograph of a dead face?" exclaimed Wyllard. "To my mind it seems like looking in a brook for a bubble that broke there a week ago."

"As a west-countryman you should remember how the otter-hounds hunt the bead on the water," answered Distin. "With a photograph the police ought to be able to trace that girl—even in the wilderness of London."

"But if she were a foreigner, and only passed through London?" suggested Wyllard.

"Even then she would leave her bead, like the otter. She could not get a night's shelter without some one knowing of her coming and going. Unless she slept in the lowest form of lodging-house—a place through which the herd of strange faces are always passing—the probabilities are in favor of her face being remembered."

"Judging by the neatness of her clothes and the refinement of her features, she must have been the last person likely to set foot in a common lodging-house," said Heathcote. "But there was no money found upon her—neither purse, nor papers of any kind."

"That fact is to me almost conclusive," said Distin.

"Upon what point?"

"It convinces me that she was made away with."

"Indeed," exclaimed Wyllard, much surprised, "the thing never occurred to me in that light."

"Naturally, my dear friend. You have not devoted twenty years of your life to the study of the criminal mind," answered the lawyer, easily. "Don't you see that the first thought of a man who made up his mind to throw a girl out of a train—unless he did the act in a blind fury which gave him no time for thought of any kind—his first precaution, I say, would be to see that there was no evidence of her identity upon her, more especially where the victim was a stranger in the land, as this poor thing was. The identification of the victim is often half-way toward the identification of the murderer. But if the dead can be buried unrecognized—a nameless, unknown waif, in whose fate no private individual is interested—why, after the funeral the murderer may take his ease and be merry, assured that he will hear no more of the matter. Public interest in a mysterious crime of that kind soon dies out."

"And you think that this poor girl was the victim of a crime?" asked the coroner, surprised to find his own idea shared by the great authority.

"In my own mind, I have no doubt she was murdered."

"But why should she not have committed suicide?"

"Why should she have traveled from London to Cornwall in order to throw herself over that particular embankment?" demanded Distin. "An unnecessary luxury, where there were the Holborn Viaduct and a score of bridges at her service, to say nothing of the more natural exit by her own bedroom window. Besides, in the statistics of self-murder you will find that nineteen out of twenty suicides—nay, I might almost say ninety-nine out of a hundred—leave a piteous little note explaining the motive of the deed—an appeal to posterity, as it were. 'See how great a sufferer I have been, and what a heroic end I have made.' No; there is only one supposition that would admit of this girl being her own destroyer. Some ruffian in the train might have so scared her that she flung herself out in a frantic effort to escape from him. But against this possibility there is the fact of the absence of any purse or papers. She could not have been traveling that distance without, at least, a few shillings in her possession."

"Who knows?" said Julian Wyllard. "Very narrow are the straits of genteel poverty. If, as I suppose, she was a poor little nursery governess going to her situation, she may have had just money enough to pay for her railway ticket, and no more. She may have relied upon her employers meeting her at the station with a conveyance"

"If she were a nursery governess, due at some country house on that day, surely her employers would have communicated with the Bodmin police before now," said Distin.

"News finds its way slowly to sleepy old houses in remote districts off the railway," replied Wyllard. "There are people still living in Cornwall who depend upon a weekly paper for all news of the outer world."

"If the poor girl were going to such benighted wretches, let us hope they will wake in a day or two, and enlighten us about her," said Distin. "And now to be distinctly practical, and to tell you

what I am going to do. Mr. Heathcote's carriage was announced nearly an hour ago, and I saw him looking at his watch just now."

"I was only uneasy about Mrs. Wyllard and my sister. We are keeping them up rather late," said the coroner, apologetically.

"Dora won't mind. She loves the tranquillity of midnight," replied Wyllard. "Go on, Distin. What is your plan?"

"Your adjourned inquest does not come on for nearly a fortnight," said Distin. "Now, you can't expect me to waste all that time in Cornwall—delicious as it would be to dream away existence among the roses of that delightful garden—so the best thing I can do is to run up to London to-morrow morning,"—he spoke as if he were at Maidenhead or Marlow—"find out all I can *there*, and return here in time for the coroner's next sitting, by which time," added the specialist, cheerily, "I hope we shall have got up a pretty little case for the public prosecutor. Mr. Heathcote will kindly keep me informed of any new details that crop up here. I shall have the poor little girl's photograph in my pocket-book. You'll send a messenger to your town early to-morrow morning, Wyllard, and tell the photographer to meet me at the station with his photographs of the dead girl? He ought to have them ready by that time."

"I will give the order to-night," said Wyllard; and then the three men repaired to the drawing-room.

"I have been very happy here," said Hilda to her brother; "but I thought you were never coming for me. Mrs. Wyllard must be dreadfully tired."

"Never tired of your company, Hilda," interjected Dora; "nor of Schubert."

"And as for Mr. Grahame, he has been asleep ever since dinner."

"That is a baseless calumny, Miss Heathcote. I have not lost a note of your songs. I am told that Schubert was rather a low person—convivial, that is to say—somewhat Bohemian—fond of taverns and tavern company. But I will maintain there must have been a pure and beautiful soul in the man who wrote such songs as those."

"I am so glad you like them," answered Hilda, brightening at his praise. "I dare say you often heard them in India."

"No; the people I knew in India had not such good taste as you."

"But in a country like that where ladies have so little to do music must be such a resource," persisted Hilda, who was curiously interested in Mr. Grahame's Indian experiences.

She was always wondering what his life had been like in that strange distant world, what kind of people he had known there. She wondered all the more, perhaps, on account of Bothwell's reticence. She could never get him to talk freely of his Indian days, and this gave the whole thing an air of mystery.

The clock in the great gray pile of stabling was striking twelve as the coroner's carriage drove away.

"I can not think what has happened to Mr. Grahame," said Hilda. "He used to be so lively, and now he is so dull."

"The change is palpable to others, then, as well as to me," thought Heathcote. "Whatever the cause may be, there is a change.

God help him if my fear is well grounded. If I were a criminal I would as soon have a sleuth-hound on my track as George Distin."

Mr. Distin was on his way to London before noon next day, curled up in a corner of a coupe, looing out eagerly at every station for the morning papers. He had the dead girl's photographs—full-face, profile—in his letter-case. On making his adieux at Penmorval he declared that he thoroughly enjoyed his little run into the country, his night in the fresh air.

"So delicious to wake at six—my usual hour—and smell your roses and hear your fountain," he said. "I look forward with delight to my return the week after next."

During the interval which occurred between Mr. Distin's departure and the adjourned inquest, Edward Heathcote gave himself up to his usual avocations, and took no further trouble to fathom the mystery of the stranger's untimely fate. After all, he told himself, after much brooding upon a subject that troubled him greatly, it was not for him to solve the problem. He was not the public prosecutor, nor was he a detective, nor even a criminal lawyer, like George Distin. His business was to hear what other people had to say, not to hunt up evidence against anybody. His duty began when he took his seat at an inquest, and ended when he left it. Why then should he vex his mind with dark suspicions against a man who was the near kinsman, the adopted brother, of that woman for whose sake or for whose happiness he would have gladly died?

This was how Edward Heathcote argued with himself, and it was in pursuance of this conclusion that he gave himself up to a life of idleness during the twelve days that succeeded Mr. Distin's departure. He went for long rides in the early mornings, he drove with his sister and the twins in the afternoon. He appeared at two archery meetings, and three tennis parties, a most unusual concession to the claims of society, and he dawdled away the rest of his existence reading the last new books in English, French, and German, and discussing them with Hilda's duenna, Theresa Meyerstein, a curious specimen of the German fräulein, intensely domestic, and yet deeply learned—a woman able to turn from Schopenhauer to strawberry jam, from Plato to plum-pudding—a woman who knew every theory that had ever been started upon the mind and its functions, and who could tell to a hundredweight how much coal ought to be consumed in a gentleman's household. Mr. Heathcote had discovered this paragon of domesticity and erudition, acting as deputy-manager at a pension at Baden, during the first year of his widowhood, and he brought her away from the white-slavery and the scanty remuneration of that institution to the luxury of an English country house and the certainty of a liberal recompense for her labors. Fräulein Meyerstein rewarded her employer by a most thorough fidelity, and adored Hilda and the twin daughters. Her soul had languished in a chilling atmosphere for lack of something to love, and she lavished the garnered treasures of long years upon these Cornish damsels who were committed to her care.

More than once during these long summer days Hilda urged the necessity of calling at Penmorval; but her brother told her she could go alone, or take the fräulein, who dearly loved a drive and a gos-

sip over a cup of tea, and who was always kindly received by Mrs. Wyllard, in spite of her short petticoats, anatomical boots, and Teutonic bonnets.

"You can perform those small civilities without any assistance from me," said Heathcote. "You women are so tremendously posted in the details of etiquette. Now, it would never have occurred to me that because we dined at Penmorval a few nights ago, we were strenuously bound to call upon Mrs. Wyllard before the end of the week. I thought that with friends of long standing those Draconic laws were a dead letter."

"I don't mean to say that we need be ceremonious, Edward," answered Hilda, "but I am sure Mrs. Wyllard will expect to see us. She will think we are forgetting her if we don't go."

"Then you go, dear, and let her see that you are not forgetful, whatever I may be," said Heathcote.

He had a horror of entering that house of Penmorval just now, lest he should see or hear something that would give him new cause for suspecting Bothwell. He had a feeling that he could only cross that threshold as the bringer of evil; and it would be a bitter thing for him to carry evil into her home for whose peace he had prayed night and morning for the last eight years.

So Hilda drove her ponies up the hill to Penmorval, and Miss Meyerstein sat beside her in all the glory of her new bonnet, sent from Munich by a relative, and reported as the very latest fashion in that city. Unhappily for the success of the bonnet in Cornwall, Bodmin fashions and Munich fashions were wide as the poles asunder. Bodmin boasted a milliner who took the fashion magazines, and beguiled her clients with the idea that everything she made from them was Parisian. The Bodmin milliner had a heavy hand, and laid on feathers and flowers as if with a trowel; but her bonnets and hats were light as thistle-down in comparison with the art of Bavaria.

It was the afternoon of the adjourned inquest, and Mr. Distin was on the scene, ready to watch the inquiry. He had arrived at Penmorval in time for breakfast, after traveling all night.

"Such a good way of getting rid of the night," he said, as he discussed a salmi of trout, caught in the stream that traversed Penmorval Park.

Alone in the library with Julian Wyllard, after breakfast, the London lawyer confessed that for once in his life he had been pretty nearly beaten. He had shown the photographs of the dead face to two of the cleverest detectives in London—had set one to work in the east and the other in the west—promising a liberal reward for any valuable information; and nothing had come of their labors. One had tried every lodging-house within a certain radius of Paddington. The other had explored the neighborhood of London Bridge Station, and failing there had come as far west as Charing Cross. The ground had been thoroughly beaten, and no likely place had been forgotten in which a stranger of this girl's class could find shelter.

"She might have gone to the house of friends," suggested Wyllard.

"If she had friends in London—were they ever such slight acquaintances even—they would have been heard of before now," argued Distin. "I take it that she was unknown to a mortal on this side of the Channel, except the man who murdered her, and who had no doubt some very powerful motive for wanting to get rid of her."

"What do you suppose that motive to have been?"

"My dear Wyllard, what a question for a clever man to ask!" exclaimed the lawyer, with a shade of contempt. "To speculate upon the motive I must have some knowledge of the man, and of this girl's murderer I know nothing. If I could once find the man I should soon find the motive. Such a murder as this generally means the breaking of some legal tie that has become onerous, some bond which death alone can loosen."

CHAPTER IV.

BOTHWELL DECLINES TO ANSWER.

THE room at the Vital Spark was filled to overflowing on the occasion of the adjourned inquiry. At the previous examination only the inhabitants of Bodmin and its immediate neighborhood had been present; but on this second afternoon people had come from long distances, and there was not standing room for the audience, which filled the passage, and waited with strained ears to catch a stray word now and then through the open door.

The idea of a profound mystery—of a dastardly crime—had been fostered in the local mind by the newspapers, which had harped upon the ghastly theme, and gloated over the particulars of the nameless girl's fate in paragraphs and leaderettes *ad nauseam*. Articles headed, "More details concerning the Bodmin mystery," "Further particulars about the strange death on the railway," had served as the salt to give savor to cut and dried paragraphs about the harvest, the markets, and those small offenders whose peccadilloes furnish the material for justice to work upon at petty sessions.

Everyone had read about that strange death of a lonely girl in the summer sunset. Every one was interested in a fate so melancholy—an abandonment so inexplicable.

"I thought that there was hardly ever a human being so isolated as to be cared for and owned by no one," said the curate of Wadebridge. "Yet it would seem that this poor girl had no one to care for her in life, or to identify her after death. If she had one friend living in England or France, surely that person must have made some sign before now."

"People in France are very slow to hear about anything that happens in England," replied Dr. Menheniot, to whom the curate had been talking.

"But I heard Mr. Heathcote, at the first inquiry, say that he meant to advertise in a Parisian newspaper."

"Then be sure the advertisement appeared," answered Menheniot. "Heathcote is one of those few men with whom meaning and doing are the same thing."

The inquiry dragged its slow length along, and hardly one new fact was elicited. There was a great deal of repetition, in spite of the coroner's attempt to keep all his witnesses to the point in their evidence. Mr. Distin sat near the coroner, and asked a few questions of two or three of the witnesses, and though he elicited no actually new facts, he seemed to put things in a clearer light by his cross-examination.

Just before the close of the inquiry, he said—

"I see Mr. Grahame, of Penmorval, is here this afternoon. I should like to ask him a question or two, if you have no objection."

The coroner paled ever so slightly at this suggestion, but he had no objection to offer, so Bothwell Grahame was asked to come up to the table, and kiss the book, which he did with a somewhat bewildered air, as if the thing came upon him as an unpleasant surprise.

"You were in the train that evening, I believe, Mr. Grahame?" said Distin.

"I was."

"And you saw this girl fall?"

"I saw her fall—but as I saw just a little less than Dr. Menheniot and the guard saw, I don't see the good of my being questioned," answered Bothwell, with rather a sullen air.

"I beg your pardon," returned Mr. Distin, suavely, "every witness sees an event from a different point of view. You may have noticed something which escaped the two witnesses we have just heard."

"I noticed nothing more than you have been told by these two, and I saw less than they saw. I did not look out of the window till I heard the girl's shriek, and I saw her in the act of falling."

"Good. But you may have observed this solitary girl—a foreigner, and therefore more noticeable—on the platform at Plymouth. You were on the platform at Plymouth, you know."

"Of course, I was. But I did not see the girl at the station."

"Strange that she should have escaped your observation, although the porter who was busy with his duties had time to notice her," said Mr. Distin.

"Would it surprise you to hear that during the four or five minutes I spent in the station before the train started I was standing at the bookstall buying papers, with my back to the platform?"

"That would account for your not having seen this noticeable young stranger. You were in Plymouth for several hours, I believe, Mr. Grahame?"

"I was; but upon my word I don't see what bearing that fact can have upon this inquiry."

"Perhaps not. Still you will not object to tell us what you were doing in Plymouth—how you disposed of your time there."

This question evidently troubled Bothwell, simple as it was, and easy as it ought to have been to answer.

"I played a game at billiards at the Duke of Cornwall," he said.

"I am sure you are too good a player for that to occupy more than half an hour," said Mr. Distin, with his silky air, as if he were employed in a very pleasant business, and were bent upon being as cheery as possible.

"I had to wait for the table."

"Come, now, Mr. Grahame, don't you be mysterious about so simple a matter," exclaimed Mr. Distin. "You don't mean to tell us that you went to Plymouth by the 12:15 train"—he had ascertained this fact before the inquiry began—"and spent the whole of the day there in order to play a game at billiards in a public billiard-room? You must have had other business in Plymouth."

"Certainly I had other business there."

"Will you kindly tell us what that business was?"

"As it concerned others besides myself, and as it has not the faintest bearing upon this case, I must decline to answer that question."

"Really, now, I should advise you to be more frank. You leave Bodmin early in the day—without giving any notice of your departure—and you return late in the evening. A most mysterious catastrophe occurs on the train which brings you home—a death so strange, so horrible, that it casts a cloud over all the passengers traveling by that train—leaves a stigma upon all, as it were, until the guilt of that deed is brought home to one. Surely under such circumstances the utmost frankness is desirable. Every traveler in that train should be ready to answer any question which those who are charged with the elucidation of this mystery may ask."

"I have answered your questions as to what occurred to me in the train and at the station, but I decline to be catechised about my business in Plymouth," answered Bothwell, doggedly.

"That will do," said Mr. Distin; and Bothwell went to his seat next Julian Wyllard, whose handsome presence appeared in the front rank of spectators, amongst those of the *élite* who were favored with chairs, while the commonalty stood in a mob at the back of the room.

The audience had been breathless during this examination of Bothwell Grahame. The young man's sunburnt face was clouded with anger, his dark strongly-marked brows were scowling over those gray-blue eyes which once had such a pleasant expression.

"I can't think what has come to Grahame," muttered a sporting squire to his next neighbor. "He used to be such a pleasant fellow, but to day he looks like a murderer."

"You—you don't think he threw the girl out of the train, do you?" asked the other.

"God forbid! But by that London laywer's questions one would think *he* suspected Grahame of having had a hand in the business."

The jury gave their verdict presently—"Death from misadventure."

"Tell Dora not to expect me at dinner," said Bothwell to Mr. Wyllard, before they left the inn. "I shall dine in Bodmin."

"Have you any engagement?"

"No, but I can easily make one. I am not going to break bread with your lawyer friend. So long as he is at Penmorval I shall be missing."

"My dear Bothwell, you have no right to be angry at a simple question which you might have so easily answered," remonstrated Julian Wyllard, gravely.

"It was a question which I did not choose to answer, and which

he had no right to ask. It was an outrage to ask such a question —to press it as he did. Fifty years ago he would have been shot for a lesser insult. By Jove, I never felt more sorry that the good old dueling days are over—the days when one man could not insult another with impunity."

"How savage you are, Bothwell, and against a man who was only in the exercise of his profession!"

"He had no right to question me as if I were a murderer," retorted Bothwell, savagely. "Did he think that I spent my time in Plymouth plotting that girl's death? If I had made up my mind to push a woman over an embankment I should not have wanted to spend a day in Plymouth in order to plan the business. A murder of that kind must be touch and go—no sooner thought of than done."

"All trouble would have been saved, my dear fellow, if you had given a straight answer to a simple question."

"To answer would have been to acknowledge his right to question me. No judge would have allowed counsel to have asked such a motiveless question. It is only at a petty rustic inquiry that such a thing could be permitted."

"I can only say that you are needlessly angry, Bothwell," said Mr. Wyllard. "Here comes Distin. You had better drive home with us?"

"No, thank you; I shall be home before the house shuts up, but you'll see no more of me to-night."

"Good-night, then."

The Penmorval barouche was waiting before the porch of the Vital Spark, a great day for that rural hostelry when such a carriage could be seen waiting there—a great day at the bar, where all the strength of the establishment could not serve brandies and sodas and pale ales fast enough. George Distin came tripping out and took his place in the carriage beside Julian Wyllard. He had lingered at the inn for a few minutes' talk with the coroner.

"Is not Mr. Grahame going back with us?" he asked, as they drove toward the town.

"No. You wounded his dignity by those questions of yours. He is a curious young man, and easily offended."

"He is a very curious young man," answered the lawyer, with a thoughtful air. He was looking at the landscape intently as they drove along the shady road, between deep banks and luxuriant hedges, but he would have found it rather difficult to say afterward what kind of timber prevailed in the hedgerows, or what crops grew in the fields. And yet he had a keen eye for nature when his mind was free to observe.

He was thoughtful all that evening, though he did his utmost to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Wyllard at dinner, talking to her of art, music, the drama, society, all the arts and graces and pleasures of life—doing all in his power to distract her thoughts from that one grim theme which was the motive of his presence in that place.

When she was gone and Distin and his host were alone together over their claret, the lawyer dropped his society manner as if it had been a mask, and began to talk seriously.

"For the first time for a good many years I find myself com-

pletely at fault," he said, leaning across the table, and cracking a filbert as if in sheer distraction of mind. "I thought that I should be able to get up a case while I was in London, but not a shred of evidence have I discovered. If this girl had dropped from the moon it could not be more difficult to trace her."

"Well, my dear Distin, you have done your best, and we must be satisfied," replied Julian Wyllard, quietly. "I felt it to be my duty as a magistrate to do all in my power to fathom the mystery of that poor girl's death. The best thing I could do was to put the case in your hands. If you can not help us no one can. We must be satisfied."

"But I am not satisfied, Wyllard; I never shall be satisfied until I have solved this problem," said Distin, resolutely. "I am not the kind of man who can stand being baffled in a matter of this kind. Is all my professional training to go for nothing, do you think? And yet in your interest it might be best that I should let this business drop out of my mind—forget the whole story if possible."

"How do you mean, in *my* interest?" exclaimed Wyllard, surprised. "What bearing can the case have upon me or my interest, beyond my desire to do my duty as a magistrate."

"I fear that this mystery touches you nearer than you suppose. Surely, Wyllard, you must have been struck by the manner of your wife's kinsman under my examination."

"Great heaven!" cried Wyllard; "you don't mean to tell me that you suspect Bothwell Grahame of any hand in this business?"

"In perfect frankness, between man and man, I believe that young man to be in some way—either as principal or accessory—concerned in the murder of that girl."

"My dear Distin, you must be mad."

"Come, now, my dear Wyllard, you can not pretend that you did not notice the strangeness of Mr. Grahame's manner this afternoon. His refusal to answer my question about his business in Plymouth."

"He was angry at your catechising him in that manner; and I must confess that your question appeared to the last degree irrelevant, even to me."

"Granted. My question was irrelevant. But it was a test question. I should never have cross-examined Mr. Grahame if I had not seen reasons for suspecting him before the inquiry began. I was painfully impressed by his manner the night I dined here with him; and I believe, from certain indications dropped unconsciously by your coroner, that he, too, saw reason for suspecting Mr. Grahame. His manner to-day confirms my suspicion. I am deeply grieved that it should be so, on your wife's account."

"You had need be sorry for her. Why, Bothwell is like a brother to her. It would break her heart," said Wyllard, strongly agitated.

He had risen from the table, and was walking slowly up and down the room, between the windows opening wide upon the gray evening sky, and the warm lamplight within. George Distin could not see his face—but he could see that he was strongly moved.

"My dear fellow, let us hope that Mrs. Wyllard will never know

anything about this suspicion of mine," said Distin, soothingly. "I have—so far—not one scrap of evidence against Mr. Grahame, except the evidence of looks and manner, and the one fact of his refusal to say what he was doing in Plymouth the day of the girl's death. There is nothing in all that to bring a man to the gallows. I may have my own ideas about this mystery—and Mr. Heathcote may have pretty much the same notion—but there is nothing to touch your wife's cousin so far. I shall go back to town, and try to forget the whole matter. All you have to do is to keep your own counsel, and take care that Mrs. Wyllard knows nothing of what has passed in strictest confidence between you and me."

"I would not have her know it for worlds. It would break her heart, it would kill her, in all probability. Women can not bear such shocks. And to think that a man can be suspected of a crime on such grounds—suspected by you, a student of crime and criminals. Because of a moody manner—a refusal to answer a question. The whole thing seems too absurd for belief."

"Say that the thing is absurd, and that for once in his life George Distin has made a fool of himself. Take your wife to Aix les Bains—or to Biarritz."

Julian Wyllard started at that last word as if he had been stung.

"What the deuce is the matter with you, or with Biarritz?" asked Distin, sharply.

"Nothing. My mind was wandering, that's all. You were saying—"

"That you had better forget all that has passed between us to-night—forget the death of that girl—make a clean slate. Take your wife to some foreign watering-place, the brightest and gayest you can find. And let Bothwell Grahame dree his weird as best he may. The catastrophe on the railway will be forgotten in a week."

"I doubt it. We have not much to think about at Bodmin, and we exaggerate all our molehills into mountains. That girl's death will be talked about for the next six months."

"And yet the people go on existing in such places, and think they are alive," exclaimed Distin.

He left Penmorval after breakfast next morning, without having seen Bothwell, who was out on the hills breaking in a new horse while the family were at breakfast. He had been out since five o'clock, the butler told Mrs. Wyllard.

"Is he riding Glencoe?" she asked, with a look of alarm.

"Yes, ma'am."

"He is a dreadful horse, I know, Julian," she said. "Manby told me about him only yesterday. He had narrowly escaped being thrown the day before; and he said that Glencoe was a really dangerous horse, and that we ought to get rid of him."

"So that he may break somebody else's bones," suggested Mr. Distin; "that is what a good coachman always advises."

"And now Bothwell has gone out on him, alone."

"You would not have him take some one to pick him up if he fell," said Wyllard. "My dear Dora, there is not the slightest occasion for alarm. The horse is young, and a little gay; but your cousin excels as a rough rider, and there will be no harm done."

"But why should he want to ride that horse," said Dora. "I'm sure Manby would advise him not."

"The very reason why he should do it," replied her husband.

"I wonder if he is trying to kill himself while I am eating my breakfast calmly here," speculated George Distin. "He must know that I suspect him; and he may think that the game is up."

Whatever Bothwell's intentions might have been, he came back to Penmorval before eleven o'clock, bringing home the big bay hunter bathed in sweat, and as tame as a sheep.

"A fine, honest horse, only wants riding," he said, as he flung the bridle to the groom, who had been watching for him at the stable gates with an air of expecting to see broken bones.

In the hall, Bothwell met Dora, cool and calm, and beautiful in her white muslin breakfast-gown. She was bringing in a basket of stephanotis from the hot-house, to be arranged by her own hands.

"Is that London lawyer gone yet," asked Bothwell, curtly.

He could not be civil even to his cousin when he spoke of George Distin.

"Yes, he has gone. I hope never to come back again," said Dora. "He is really a very well-bred man, and he made himself most agreeable here; but he seemed to bring with him an atmosphere of crime. I could not help thinking of all the horrible cases he must have been concerned in, and that he had grown rich by the crimes of mankind. He could find out nothing about that poor girl's death, it seems, although he is so clever."

"Which goes rather to establish my view that the girl fell out of the train by accident," replied Bothwell.

CHAPTER V.

SENT TO COVENTRY.

THE year was a month older since Mr. Distin went back to town, baffled and angry with himself, yet glad for his friend's sake that his discoveries had gone no further. The heather was purpling on the hills, where the dwarf furze flashed here and there into patches of gold. The tourist season had set in; but the tourist for the most part avoided the little town of Bodmin, nestling snugly inland among the hills, and turned his face to the sea and the wild rocks which defend that romantic western coast, to the Lizard and the Land's End, to romantic Turtagel, and sandy Bude.

Life at Penmorval had drifted by as calmly as an infant's sleep in those four weeks of soft summer weather. There had been no visitors staying in the house, for both Julian Wyllard and his wife loved a studious repose, and there were long intervals in which they lived almost alone. Penmorval would be full by and by in October when the pheasant shooting began; and in the meantime it was pleasant to Mrs. Wyllard to be able to ride and drive with her husband—to be the companion of his walks, to read the books he read, and to waste long evenings in inexhaustible talk. They always had so much to say to each other. The sympathy between them was so complete.

Hilda Heathcote was at Penmorval nearly every day. She ranked

almost as one of the family. She came to Mrs. Wyllard for counsel and instruction upon all manner of subjects—sometimes for a gardening lesson, sometimes for a lesson in crewelwork, in French, German, Italian. Dora was in advance of her young friend in all these subjects; but the pupil was so bright and quick that it was a pleasure to teach her. Between them Mrs. Wyllard and Miss Heathcote achieved marvels in the way of art-needlework—piano-backs which were as beautiful as pictures, portières worthy to rank with the highest examples of Gobelin tapestry, counterpanes that ought to have been exhibited at South Kensington. The calm leisure of country life lent itself to such slow and elaborate labors.

Mrs. Wyllard had a big box of foreign books once a month from Rolandi's library, and she meted out to Hilda such volumes as were fit for a young English lady's perusal; and then they met to talk over the books—sometimes alone, sometimes with Bothwell as a third. Bothwell was very scornful of all the sentimental books, laughed at the super-refined heroines of French novels, the dreamy heroes of German romance; but he read all the books that Hilda read, and he seemed to enjoy talking about them at that protracted feast of afternoon tea from which he rarely absented himself.

The weather was peerless during this month of August, and Mrs. Wyllard's afternoon tea-table was set out in an arbor of clipped yew, at the end of the Italian garden, a point from which there was a fine view of the moors, and the great brown fields beyond.

Bothwell's sullen gloom had passed away soon after Mr. Distin's departure. He seemed to Hilda to have become once again the old Bothwell—gay and cheery, and kind and frank. But he did not commit himself by any of those delicate little attentions to Hilda which had made him such an agreeable person half a year ago. That particular phase of his character was a thing of the past.

A month had gone since the close of the inquest at the Vital Spark, but Bodmin people had not forgotten the strange death of the nameless girl, and had not left off talking about it. They talked about Bothwell, too, and of his refusal to give a plain answer to a plain question; and toward the end of that month Bothwell Grahame woke up all at once to the consciousness that he was under a cloud. He discovered that he was being cut by his old acquaintances, so far as they dared cut a man of his standing and temperament. They were not uncivil; they gave him good-day if they met him in the street; they would even deign to discuss the state of the weather, the prospects of the crops. But Bothwell felt nevertheless that he was living under a cloud—there was a tacit avoidance of him, a desire to get off with as slight a greeting as civility would permit. Hands were no longer held out to him in friendship, greetings were no longer loud and cheery. No one asked him to stop and play billiards at the chief inn, as people had been wont to do, waylaying him when he wanted to get home. Now he could pursue his walk without let or hinderance. He had even seen one of his most familiar friends stroll dreamily round a corner to avoid meeting him.

During the whole of those four weeks he had not received a single invitation to play lawn tennis, he for whose presence tennis parties used to compete. There were two or three engagements out-

standing at the time of the inquest. He had kept these and had played his best, struggling against a coldness in the atmosphere. It had seemed to him that everybody was out of sorts. There was an all pervading dullness. Nobody could find anything pleasant to talk about. He had been very slow to perceive that cloud which hung over him, but by the end of the month the fact had become too palpable, and Bothwell Grahame understood that he had been "sent to Coventry."

"What does it all mean?" he asked himself aghast with indignant wonder, "what can they have to say against me? Can any one have found out—"

Bothwell's cheek paled as he thought of that one transaction in his life which he would least like to see recorded against him. But he told himself, after a few minutes' reflection, that nobody in Bodmin could possibly know anything about that particular episode in a young man's history.

He puzzled himself sorely about this change in the manner of his acquaintance, and on trying back he discovered that the change dated from the day of the adjourned inquest. He recalled, too, the curious manner in which everybody had avoided the subject of the inquest before him; how when any mention of the dead girl had been made in his presence, the conversation had been changed instantly, as if the subject must needs be tabooed before him.

"Upon my soul," said Bothwell, "I begin to think they suspect me of having thrown that girl out of the carriage. Because I refused to answer that insolent ruffian's questions, these village wiseacres have made up their minds that I am a murderer."

He went back to Penmorval in a white heat of indignation; a week ago he had made up his mind to start for Peru. He had found out all about the steamer which was to carry him. He had obtained a letter of introduction to the proprietor of a newspaper, to some of the local aristocracy. He was ready to start forth upon his quest of fortune in the land of gold and jewels. But now he had told himself that wild horses should not drag him away from Penmorval. He would stand his ground until he had humiliated those fools and rascals whom he had once called his friends. He would make them taste of the cup of their own folly.

He was much too hot-headed to keep the secret of his wrongs from that cousin who had been to him as a sister. He went straight to Dora, and told her of the foul suspicion that had arisen in men's minds against him.

She had read the report of the inquest, and although she had wondered at his refusal to answer Mr. Distin's question, she had been able to understand that his pride might revolt against being so catechised, and that he might choose to persist in that refusal as a point of personal dignity.

"Any one who can suspect you for such a reason—any one who could suspect you for any reason must be an idiot, Bothwell," she exclaimed. "There is no use in being angry with such people."

"But I am angry with them. I am rabid with anger."

"Why did you not answer that question, Bothwell?" asked his cousin, thoughtfully.

"Because I did not choose."

"Yet it would have prevented all possibility of misapprehension if you had given a straight answer. And it would have been so easy," argued Dora.

"It would not have been easy. It was not possible to answer that question."

"Why not?"

"Because I could not answer it without injuring some one—I esteem," replied Bothwell, relapsing into that curious, sullen manner which Mr. Heathcote had observed on the day of the inquest.

"Oh, Bothwell, you have secrets then—a secret from me, your adopted sister?"

"Yes, I have my secrets."

"I am so sorry. I used to hope that I should have a share in the planning of your life, and now I begin to fear—"

"That my life is wrecked already. You are right, Dora. My life was wrecked three years before I left India, but I did not know then what shipwreck meant. I thought that there was land ahead, and that I should make it; but I know now I was drifting toward a fatal rock upon which honor, happiness, and prosperity must needs go to pieces."

"Don't talk in riddles, Bothwell. Tell me the plain truth, however bad it may be. You know you can trust me."

"I do, dear soul, as I trust heaven itself. But there are some things a man must not tell. Yes, Dora, I have my secret, and it is a hard one to carry—the secret of a man who is bound in honor to one woman while he fondly loves another."

"Bothwell, I am heartily sorry for you," said his cousin, softly. She put her arms round his neck as if they had still been boy and girl. She put her lips to his fevered forehead. She comforted him with her love, being able to give him no other comfort.

* * * * * * *

Hilda Heathcote came up the avenue ten minutes later, escorting a matchless donkey, which was of so pale a gray as to be almost white. It was a donkey of surpassing size and dignity, and gave itself as many airs as if it had been a white elephant. It carried a pair of panniers, highly decorated in a Moorish fashion, and in the Moorish panniers sat Edward Heathcote's twin daughters.

The twins were as like as the famous Corsican Brothers in person, but they were utterly unlike in disposition, and the blue and pink sashes which they wore for distinction were quite unnecessary; since no one could have mistaken Minnie, the overbearing twin, for Jennie, the meek twin. People only had to be in their company half an hour to know which was which forever after. Minnie always came to the front, was always mistress of the situation, and where Jennie shed tears, Minnie always stamped her foot. Needless to say that Minnie was everybody's favorite. Naughtiness at four years old, a termagant in miniature, is always interesting. Mr. Heathcote was the only person in Cornwall who could manage Minnie, and who properly appreciated Jennie's yielding nature. Jennie felt that her father loved her, and used to climb on his knee and nestle in his waistcoat, while Minnie was charming society by those little airs and graces which were spoken of vaguely as "showing off."

To-day Minnie was in a delightful humor, for she was being escorted in triumph to a long-promised festival. Since the very beginning of the summer the twins had been promised that they should go to drink tea with Mrs. Wyllard some day when they had been very good. Jennie had done everything to deserve the favor, but Minnie had offended in somewise every day. She had been cruel to the dogs—she had made an archipelago of blots in her copy-book, while her pothooks and hangers were a worse company of cripples than Falstaff's regiment. She had been rude to the kind fräulein. She had been rebellious at dinner, had protested with loud wailings against the severity of seven o'clock bed. Only toward the end of August had there come a brief interval of calm, and Hilda had been quick to take advantage of these halcyon days, knowing how soon they would be followed by storm.

The tea-table was laid in the yew-tree arbor, such a table as little children love, and which has an attractive air even to full-grown humanity. Such a delicious variety of cakes and jams and home-made bread, such nectarines and grapes. Minnie shouted and clapped her hands at sight of the feast, while Jennie blushed and hung her head, abashed at the dazzling apparition of Mrs. Wyllard in an Indian silk gown with a scarlet sash, and flashing diamond rings. Hilda had no such jewels on her sunburnt fingers.

"What a nice tea," cried Minnie, when the blue and pink twins had each been provided with a comfortable seat, each in a snug corner of the arbor, banked in by the tea-table. "Why do we never have such nice teas at home? Why don't we, Aunt Hilda?" she repeated, when her question had been ignored for a couple of seconds.

"Because such nice things would not be wholesome every day," replied Hilda.

"I don't believe that," said Minnie.

"Oh, Minnie!" cried Jennie, with a shocked air. "You mustn't contradict people. You mustn't contradict Aunt Hilda, because she is old."

"If cakes weren't wholesome *she* wouldn't have them," said Minnie, ignoring the blue twin's interruption, and pointing her chubby fingers at Mrs. Wyllard. "She can have what she likes, and she is grown up and knows everything. She wouldn't give us unwholesome things. I know why we don't have such nice teas at home."

"Why not, Minnie?" asked Dora, to encourage conversation.

"Because fräulein is too stingy. I heard cook say so the other day. She is always grumbling about the cream and butter. You don't grumble about the cream and butter, do you?" she asked, in her point-blank way.

"I'm afraid I'm not so good a housekeeper as the fräulein," answered Dora.

"Then I like bad housekeepers best. I shall be a bad housekeeper when I grow up, and there shall always be cakes for tea—ever so many cakes, as there are here. I'll have some of that, please," pointing to an amber-tinted pound-cake, "first."

By this Minnie signified that she meant to eat her way through the varieties of the tea-table.

"And what will Jennie take?" asked Dora, smiling at the blue twin.

"Jennie's a bilious child," said Minnie, authoritatively, "she ought to have something very plain."

Jennie, with her large blue eyes fixed pathetically on the pound-cake, waited for whatever might be given to her.

"Do you think just one slice of rich cake would make you ill, Jennie?" asked Dora.

"I'm sure it would," said Minnie, plowing her way through her own slice. "She's always sick. She was sick when we went to see grandma. Grandma isn't rich, you know, because her husband was a clergyman, and they're always poor. But she gives us beautiful teas when we go to see her, and lets us run about her garden and pick the fruit, and trample on the beds and do just as we like, so we don't mind going to tea with grandma though she's old and deaf. Jennie had cherries and pound-cake the last time we went to see grandma, and she was ill all night. You know you were, Jennie."

The blue twin admitted the fact, and meekly accepted a hunch of sanitarian sponge-cake.

"You must not talk so much, Minnie; you are a perfect nuisance," said Hilda; and then she looked round hesitatingly once or twice before she asked, "What has become of Mr. Grahame? He generally honors us with his company at afternoon tea."

"Bothwell has been a little worried this morning," faltered Dora. "He is not very well."

Her heart sunk within her at the thought that this girl—this girl whom she had once thought of as Bothwell's future wife—would come in time to know the dark suspicion which hung over him like a poisonous cloud. She would be told by and by that people thought of him as a possible murderer, a wretch who had assailed a defenseless girl, set upon her as a tiger on his prey, hurled her to a dreadful death. She would learn that there were people in the neighborhood capable of suspecting this very Bothwell Grahame, gentleman and soldier, of so dastardly a crime.

Dora had hardly been able to realize the awfulness of the situation yet. In her desire to comfort her cousin she had made light of the unspoken slander, the cruel taint which had been breathed upon his name. But now, as she sat at her tea-table ministering to her two little guests, trying to appear interested in their prattle, her heart was aching as it had not ached since she had been forgiven by Edward Heathcote. From that hour until the strange girl's death her life had been cloudless. And now a cloud had drifted across her horizon, darkening the sunlight—a cloud that hung heavily over the head of one whom she dearly loved.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLERICAL WARNING.

THE children's tea-party lasted a long time, and the twins enjoyed themselves prodigiously in the Yew Tree Arbor, albeit both their hostess and their aunt were curiously absent-minded, and returned

vaguest answers to Minnie's continuous prattle, and to occasional remarks propounded gravely by Jennie between two mouthfuls of cake.

Perhaps the twins enjoyed themselves all the more under this condition of things, for they were allowed to range at will from one dainty to another, and were not worried by those troublesome suggestions of unwholesomeness which are apt to harass juvenile feasters.

Tea was over at last, and then they had a game at ball on the grass in front of the fountain; after that they fed the gold-fish, and then Hilda began to think of getting them home. It was nearly seven o'clock by this time, and Bothwell had not appeared.

The whole business seemed flat and stale and unprofitable to Hilda for want of that familiar presence. He had been so pleasant of late—not attentive or flattering of speech as young men are to girls they admire. He had said none of these pretty things which call up blushes in girlish cheeks; but he had been kind and brotherly, and Hilda was satisfied to accept such kindness from him. She thought it even more than her due. She was not what is called a high-spirited girl. She did not expect men to bow down and worship her, she did not expect that hearts were to be laid at her feet for her to trample upon them. She had none of the insolence of conscious beauty. If ever she were to love it would be secretly, meekly, patiently, as Shakespeare's Helena loved Bertram, with a reverent upward-looking affection, deeming her lover remote and superior to her as a star.

There had been a time when she thought that Bothwell cared for her a little, and then he had been to her as Bertram. Now he was kind and brotherly, and she was grateful for his kindness.

She was somewhat heavy-hearted as she smoothed her disordered hair—rumpled in a final game of romps with the twins—and put on her hat to go home. The donkey was waiting before the old stone porch, and Fräulein Meyerstein had come to assist in escorting the twins.

"I thought Minnie might be troublesome after tea," she said, as if tea had the effect of champagne upon Minnie's temperament.

They set out across the fields in the warm glow of evening sunlight, a little procession—the children full of talk and laughter, Hilda more silent than usual. It was harvest time, and the corn stood in sheaves in one wide field by which they went, a field on the slope of a hill on the edge of a vast stretch of moorland. On the lower side of the field there was a tall overgrown hedge; a hedge full of the glow of sunshine and the color of wild flowers, red and blue and yellow, an exuberance of starry golden flowers, scattered everywhere amid the tangle of foliage.

There was a gap here and there in the hedge, where cattle or farm laborers had made a way for themselves from field to field, and through one of these gaps a man scrambled, and jumped into the path just in front of the donkey.

The animal gave a feeble shy, and the twins screamed, first with surprise then with pleasure. The man was Bothwell, and the twins adored Bothwell.

"Why didn't you come to tea?" asked Minnie indignantly. "It was very rude of you."

"I was out of temper, Minnie; not fit company for nice people. How do you do, Hilda?"

He had fallen into the way of calling her by her Christian name almost from the beginning of their acquaintance; in those days when he had been so much brighter and happier than he seemed to be now.

The donkey jogged on, carrying off the twins, Minnie holding forth all the time, lecturing Bothwell for his rudeness. The fräulein followed, eager to protect her charges. They were only a few paces in advance, but Hilda felt as if she were alone with Bothwell.

"So the children have had their long-promised tea-party," he said, "and I was out of it? Hard lines."

"They missed you very much," said Hilda. "But did not you know it was to be this afternoon?"

"I knew yesterday—Dora told me," answered Bothwell, hitting the wild flowers savagely with his cane as he walked by Hilda's side. Unconsciously they had fallen into a much slower pace than the fräulein and the donkey, and they were quite alone.

"I knew all about the tea-party, and I meant to be with you, and then something went wrong with me this morning and I felt only fit company for devils. If Satan had been giving a tea-party anywhere within reach I would have gone to *that*," concluded Bothwell, vindictively.

"I am very glad Satan does not give tea-parties in Cornwall. Of course, you know that he would never trust himself in our county for fear we should make him into a pie," answered Hilda, trying to smile. "But I am very sorry to hear you have been worried."

"My life has been made up of worries for the last six months. I try sometimes to be cheerful—reckless rather—and to forget; and then the viper begins to bite again."

Hilda would have given much to be able to comfort him. It seemed almost as if he looked to her for comfort, and yet what could she say to a man whose troubles she knew not—who kept his own secret, and hardened his heart against his friends?

They walked on in silence for a little way. Some of the reapers were going homeward in the soft evening light; there was a great wain being loaded a field or two off, and the voices of men and women sounded clear and musical through the summer stillness.

"Would you be sorry for a man who had brought trouble on himself from his own folly—from his own wrong-doing, Hilda?" Bothwell asked, presently.

"I should be all the more sorry for him on that account," she answered, gently.

"Yes, you would pity him. Such women as you and my cousin are angels of compassion. They never withhold their pity; but it is tempered with scorn. They despise the sinner, even while they are merciful to him."

"You ought not to say that. I am not given to despising people. I am too conscious of my own weakness."

"You are an angel," said Bothwell, piteously. "Oh, Hilda,

how much I have lost in life—how many golden opportunities I have wasted!"

"There are always other opportunities to be found," answered the girl, trying to speak words of comfort, vaguely, hopelessly, in her utter ignorance of his griefs, his perplexities. "There's always the future, and the chance of beginning again."

"Yes, in Queensland, in the Fijis, in Peru. If you mean that I may some day learn to make my own living, I grant the possibility. Queensland or Peru may do something for me. But my chances of happiness, my chances of renown, those are gone forever. I lost all when I left the army. At three-and-thirty I am a broken man. Hard for a man to feel that his life is all over and done with before he is thirty-five years old."

"I fancy there must be a time in every life when the clouds seem to shut out the sun; but the clouds do not last forever," said Hilda, softly. "I hope the cloud may pass from your sky."

"Ah, if it would, Hilda—if that cloud could pass and leave me my own man again, as I was nine years ago, before I went to India."

"You seemed to be very happy last winter—in the hunting-season," said Hilda, trying to speak lightly, though her heart was beating as furiously as if she had been climbing a mountain.

"Yes, I was happy then. I allowed myself to forget. I did not know just then that the trouble I had taken upon my shoulders was a life-long trouble. Yes, it was a happy time, Hilda, last winter. How many a glorious day we had together across country. You and I were always in the first flight, and generally near each other. Our horses were always such good friends, were they not? They loved to gallop neck and neck. Oh, my darling, I was indeed happy in those days—unspeakably happy."

He had forgotten all prudence, all self-restraint in a moment. He had taken Hilda's hand and lifted it to his lips.

"Oh, my dear one, let me tell you how I love you," he said. "I may never dare say more than that, perhaps—but it is true, and you shall hear it, if only once. Yes, Hilda, I love you. I have loved you ever since last winter, when you and I used to ride together. Oh, those happy winter days—those long waits at the corners of lanes, or in dusky thickets, or by the old mill. I shall never forget them. Do you think that I cared what became of the fox in those days, or whether we were after the right or the wrong one? Not a jot, dear. The veriest tailor that ever hung on to a horse could have cared no less for the sport than I. It was your sweet face I loved, and your friendly voice, and the light touch of your little hand. I was full of hope in those days, Hilda; and then a cloud came over my horizon and I dared hope no more. I never meant to tell you—I knew I had no right to tell you this; but my feelings were too strong for me just now. Will you forgive me, Hilda, that I who never dare to ask you to be my wife have dared to tell you of my love? Can you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," she answered gently, looking at him with tear-dimmed eyes.

She was very pale, and her lips trembled faintly as she spoke. In her inmost heart she was exulting at the knowledge of his love.

It was as if she had drunk a deep draught of the strong wine of life. In the rapture of knowing herself beloved she had no room for any other consideration. His love might be foolish, vain, unprofitable, fatal even. For the moment she could not measure the consequences or look into the future. She cared only for the fact that Bothwell Grahame loved her. That love which she had given to him in secret, in all maiden modesty, purest, most ethereal sentiment of which woman's heart is capable, had not been lavished upon a blind and dumb idol, upon a god of wood and stone.

They walked on for a few minutes in silence, Bothwell still holding Hilda's hand, but saying never a word. Alas, he had no more to say, or he dared say no more. He had told his secret, and had entreated to be forgiven. And now he came to a dead stop. Fate had walled him round with difficulties, had set a barrier before his steps. Fate, or his own folly, that easy yielding to temptation which a man prefers to think of afterward as fatality.

The thud of a horse's hoofs upon the grass on the other side of the hedge startled Bothwell from his reverie, and Hilda from her beatitude. They looked up and saw Edward Heathcote cantering toward them on his powerful black. Mr. Heathcote was renowned for his hunters. He never counted the cost of a good horse, and he never had been known to buy a bad one. He was a man who could pick out a horse in a field a quarter of a mile off, ragged and rough and unshorn, altogether out of condition, long mane and neglected tail, and could distinguish the quality of the animal to a shade. He had made most of the hunters he rode, and was not afraid to tackle the most difficult subject. He loved horses, and they loved him. This was a subject upon which he and Bothwell sympathized, and it had been a link between them hitherto. Nothing had been more friendly than their intercourse until the last few weeks, during which time Mr. Heathcote had carefully avoided Penmorval and Bothwell Grahame.

He rode through a gap in the hedge, acknowledged Bothwell's presence with a nod that was barely courteous, and then turned to his sister.

"You had better hurry home, Hilda, if you want to be in time for dinner," he said.

Bothwell was not slow to take the hint.

"Good-by, Hilda," he said, offering her his hand.

He called her by the name he loved boldly in her brother's hearing. There was even a touch of defiance in his manner as he shook hands with her, and lingered with her hand in his, a fond, sad look in his eye, before he turned and walked slowly away along the narrow path beside the bright newly-cut stubble, which glittered golden in the evening light.

Mr. Heathcote dismounted and walked beside his sister, with the black's bridle over his arm, the well-broken horse following as quietly as a dog.

"You and Grahame were in very close confabulation as I rode up, Hilda," said Heathcote, gravely, with scrutinizing eyes upon Hilda's blushing face. "Pray what was he saying to you?"

Hilda hung her head, and hesitated before she replied.

"Please do not ask me, Edward," she said, falteringly, after that embarrassed silence. "I can not tell you."

"You can not tell me, your brother, and natural guardian!" said Heathcote, severely. "Am I to understand that there is some secret compact between you and Bothwell Grahame which can not be told to your brother?"

"There is no secret compact. How unkind you are, Edward," cried Hilda, bursting into tears. "There is nothing between us, there is nothing to tell."

"Then what are you crying about, and why was that man bending over you, holding your hand just now when I rode up? A man does not talk in that fashion about nothing. He was making love to you, Hilda."

"He told me that he loved me."

"And you call that nothing?" said Heathcote, severely.

"It can never come to anything. It was a secret told unawares, on the impulse of the moment. I have no right to tell you, only you have wrung the secret from me. Nothing can ever come of it, Edward. Pray forget this thing has ever been spoken of between us."

"I begin to understand," said Heathcote. "He asked you to marry him, and you refused him. I am very glad of that."

"You have no reason to be glad," replied Hilda, with a flash of anger. She was ready to take her lover's part at the slightest provocation. "You have no right to make guesses about Mr. Grahame and me. It is surely enough for you to know that I shall never be his wife."

They had left the stubble field, and were in a lane leading to the Spaniards, a lane sunk between high banks and richly-wooded hedgerows, such as abound in that western world.

"That is enough for me to know," answered Heathcote, gravely, "but nothing less than that assurance would be enough. I hope it is given in good faith."

There was a severity in his manner which was new to Hilda. He had been the most indulgent of brothers hitherto.

"Why should you speak so unkindly about Mr. Grahame?" she said. "What objection have you to make against him, except that he is not rich?"

"His want of wealth would make no difference to me, Hilda. If it were for your happiness to marry a man of small means, I could easily reconcile myself to the idea, and would do my best to lessen the sting of poverty. I have a much graver objection against Bothwell Grahame than the fact that he is without a profession and without income. There is a dark suspicion in men's minds about him which makes him a man set apart, like Cain; and my sister must have no dealings with such a man!"

"What do you mean, Edward?" exclaimed Hilda, turning angrily upon her brother with indignant eyes. "What dark suspicion? How dare any one suspect him?"

"Unhappily, circumstances are his worst accusers. His own lips, his own manner, have given rise to the conviction which has taken hold of men's minds. When the idea that Bothwell Grahame was the murderer of that helpless girl first arose in my mind, I fought against the hideous notion. I told myself that I was a wretch to

imagine such a possibility. But when I found that the same facts had made exactly the same impression upon other minds—"

"You could think such a thing, Edward?" exclaimed Hilda, pale with horror. "You, who have known Bothwell for years, who knew him when he was a boy—you who have called yourself his friend, seen him day after day—you, a clever man, a lawyer, a man of the world—you can harbor such a thought as this? I could not have believed such a thing of you."

"Perhaps it is because I am a man of the world, and have seen life on the seamy side, and know too well to what dark gulfs men can go down when the tempter beckons them. Perhaps it is because of my experience that I suspect Bothwell Grahame."

"Oh, it is too horrible!" cried Hilda, passionately. "I feel as if I must be mad myself, or in company with a madman. Bothwell Grahame—Bothwell, whom I remember when I was a child, the frank, generous-hearted lad, who went away to India to fight for his country, and who fought so well, and won such praise from his commanding officer—"

"Yes, Hilda," interrupted her brother, "and who, just when he seemed on the high road to fortune, threw up his chance and abandoned his profession, to become an idler at home. That same Bothwell Grahame, who, when he was asked what he did with himself during a long day at Plymouth, could give no account of his time. That same Bothwell, whose manner from the hour of that catastrophe on the line, became gloomy and sullen—altered so completely that he seemed a new man. That same Bothwell, whom everybody in the neighborhood of Bodmin suspects of a foul crime. That is the man whom I do not wish my sister to marry; albeit, he is of the same flesh and blood as the woman whom I respect above all other women."

"I am glad you have remembered that—at last," said Hilda, bitterly. "I am glad you have not quite forgotten that this murderer is Dora Wyllard's first cousin—brought up with her, taught by the same teachers, reared in the same way of thinking."

"God grant that I may see reason to alter my opinion, Hilda," replied her brother. "Do you suppose that this dark suspicion of mine is not a source of profoundest pain and grief? But while I think as I do, can you wonder that I forbid any thought or suggestion of a marriage between my sister and Bothwell Grahame?"

"I have told you that I shall never be his wife," said Hilda. "Pray, do not let us ever speak his name again."

They were at the entrance to the Spaniards by this time—not the big iron gates by the lodge, but a little wooden gate opening into the fine old garden, second only in beauty to the Penmorval garden.

"Will you mind if I don't appear at dinner, Edward?" asked Hilda, presently, as they went into the house. "I have a splitting headache."

"Poor little girl!" said her brother, tenderly. "You are looking the picture of misery. I am very sorry for you, my dear. I am very sorry for us all, for I fear there is calamity ahead for some of us. If Bothwell is wise, he will go to the other end of the world, and take himself as far as possible out of the ken of his country-

men. If he should ask you for counsel, Hilda, that is the best advice you can give him."

"If he should ask me, that is just the very last counsel he would ever hear from my lips," answered Hilda, indignantly. "I would entreat him to stand his ground—to live down this vile calumny—to wait the day when Providence will clear his name from this dark cloud. Such a day will come—I am sure of that."

She went to her own room, and shut herself up for the rest of the evening. The conventional excuse of a headache answered very well with the servants. She declined all refreshment—would not have this or that brought up on a tray to oblige Glossop, her own maid, who was deeply concerned at her young mistress's indisposition.

"I have a racking headache," she said, "and all I want is to be left alone till to-morrow morning. Don't come near me, please, till you bring me my early cup of tea."

Glossop sighed, and submitted. It was not often that Miss Heathcote was so willful. Glossop was the coachman's daughter, had been born and brought up at the Spaniards in old Squire Heathcote's time. She was a buxom young woman of five-and-thirty, and counted herself almost one of the family.

At last Hilda was alone. She locked her door, and began to pace her room, up and down, up and down, with her hands clasped upon her forehead, trying to think over her perplexities.

It was a fine spacious old bedroom, lighted by old-fashioned casement windows, looking two ways—one to the garden, one to the timber-belted lawn and paddocks, which might almost take rank as a park. There was a sitting-room adjoining, which was Hilda's own particular apartment, containing her books and piano, and the little table on which she painted china cups and saucers. Hilda had spent many a happy hour in these rooms, practicing, studying, painting, dreaming, over high art needle-work. But this evening she felt as if she could never again be happy, here or anywhere. A great black cloud of grief and trouble had spread itself around her, infolding her as a mantle of darkness, shutting out all the light of life. The sun was sinking behind the tall chestnuts, in a sea of red and gold. Every leaflet of rose or myrtle that framed the casement was distinct against that clear evening sky. Such a pretty room within, such a lovely land and sky without, and yet that young soul was full of darkness.

She had defended her lover with indignant firmness just now. She had boldly alleged his innocence—declared that this thing could not be true—and now in solitude she looked in the face of that cruel suspicion, and her faith began to waver.

What could be stranger or more suspicious than Bothwell's conduct this evening? With one breath he had avowed his love—with the next he had told her that he was unworthy to be her lover—that they two could never be man and wife.

Yes, it was true that he had changed of late—that he had become gloomy, despondent, fitful. His manner had been that of a man bowed down by the burden of some secret trouble. But was he for this reason to be suspected of a horrible crime? It was cruel,

abominable of people to suspect him—most of all cruel and unworthy in her brother, who had known him from boyhood.

And then came the hideous suggestion, as if whispered in her ear by the fiend himself, "What if my brother should be right?" Her own experience of the world was of the slightest. Her only knowledge of life was derived from the novels she had read. She had read of darkest crimes, of strange contradictions in human nature, mysterious workings of the human heart. Hitherto, she had considered these lurid lights, these dark shadows, as the figments of the romancer's fancy. Now, she began to ask herself if they might not find their counterpart in fact.

She had read of gentlemanlike murderers—assassins of good bearing and polished manners—Eugene Aram—Count Fosco—and many more of the same school. What if Bothwell Grahame were such as these, hiding behind his frank and easy manner the violent passions of the criminal?

No, she would not believe it. She laughed the foul fiend to scorn. Her woman's instinct was truer than her brother's legal acumen, she told herself; and, as for those Bodmin busybodies, she weighed their wisdom as lighter than thistledown.

"I would marry him to-morrow, if he asked me to be his wife," she said to herself. "I would stand beside him at the altar in the face of all his slanderers. I would be proud to bear his name."

In an age when infidelity and scorn of religious ceremonial are very common among young men, Bothwell Graham had always been steadfast to the Church, and to the good old-fashioned habits in which he had been brought up by his aunt. He was not a zealot or an enthusiast; but he attended the services of his church with a fair regularity, and had a respect for the rector of his parish. Even in India, where men are apt to be less orthodox than at home, Bothwell had always been known as a good churchman.

For the last year it had been his custom to receive the sacrament on the first Sunday of the month. He had risen early, and had walked across the dewy fields to the old parish church, and had knelt among the people who knew him, and had felt himself all the better for that mystic sacred office, even when things were going far from well with him. There was much that was blameworthy in his life; yet he had not felt himself too base a creature to kneel among his fellow-sinners at the altar of the Sinner's Friend.

It was a shock, therefore, to receive a letter from the rector on the last day of August requesting him to absent himself from the communion services on the following Sunday, lest his presence before that altar should be a scandal to the other communicants.

"God forbid that I should condemn any man unheard," wrote the rector, "but you must be aware of the dark scandal attaching to your name. You have not come to me, as I hoped you would come, to explain the conduct which has given rise to that scandal. You have taken no step to set yourself right before your fellowmen. Can you wonder that your own silence has been in some wise your condemnation? My duty to my flock compels me to warn you that, until you have taken some steps to free your character

from the shadow of a terrible suspicion, you must not approach the altar of your parish church.

"If you will come to me, and open your heart to me, as the sinner should to his priest, I may be able to counsel and to help you. If you can clear yourself to me, I will be your advocate with your fellow-parishioners.

"Always your friend,

"JOHN MONKHOUSE."

"He did wisely to write," said Bothwell, crushing the letter in his clinched fist. "If he had spoken such words as those to me I believe I should have knocked him down, anointed priest though he is."

He answered the rector's letter within an hour after receiving it.

"I have nothing to confess," he wrote, "and that is why I have not gone to your confessional. The difficulties and perplexities of my life are such as could only be understood by a man of my own age and surroundings. They would be darker than Sanscrit to clerical gray hairs.

"Because I did not choose to answer questions which I could not answer without betraying the confidence of a friend, my wise fellow parishioners choose to suspect me of murdering a girl whose face I never saw till after her death.

"I shall attend to receive the sacrament at the eight o'clock service next Sunday, and I dare you to refuse to administer it.

"I have the honor to be,

"Yours, &c.,

"BOTHWELL GRAHAME."

He walked to Bodmin and delivered his letter at the Rectory door. He would not run the risk of an hour's delay. On his way home he overtook Hilda, near the gates of the Spaniards. She was very pale when they met, and she grew still paler as they shook hands.

After a word or two of greeting, they walked on side by side in silence.

"I wonder that you can consent to be seen with me," said Bothwell, presently, after a farmer's wife had driven past them on her way from market. "You must have heard by this time what people think about me—your brother foremost among them, I believe, for he has given me the cut direct more than once since the inquest."

"I am sorry that he should be so ready to believe a lie," said Hilda, "for I know that this terrible slander is a lie."

"God bless you for those straight, strong words, Hilda," exclaimed Bothwell, fervently. "Yes, it is a lie. I am not a good man. I have done one guilty act in my life, and the consequences of that act have been very heavy upon me. But I am not capable of the kind of wickedness which my Bodmin friends so readily impute to me. I have not risen to the sublimer heights of crime, I am not up to throwing a fellow-creature out of a railway carriage."

"Why did you not answer that man's question at the inquest?" said Hilda, urgently, forgetting that she had hardly the right to

demand his confidence. "That refusal of yours is the cause of all this misery. It seems such a foolish, obstinate act on your part."

"I dare say it does. But I could not do more or less than I did. To have answered that inquisitive cur's prying questions categorically, would have been to injure a lady. As a man of honor, I was bound to run all risks rather than do that."

"I understand," said Hilda, blushing crimson.

Why had she not guessed his secret long before this? she asked herself. The mystery that surrounded him was the mystery of some fatal love affair. She was only a secondary person in his life. There was another who had been more to him than she, Hilda, could ever be—another to whom he was bound, for whom he was willing to sacrifice his own character. She felt a bitter pang of jealousy at the mere thought of that unknown one.

"No, you can never understand," exclaimed Bothwell, passionately. "You can never imagine the misery of a man who has bound himself by a fatal tie which chains him to one woman, long after his heart has gone out to another. I gave away my liberty while I was in India, Hilda; pledged myself for all time to one who could give me but little in return for my faith and devotion. I dare not tell you the circumstances of that bondage—the fatality which led to that accursed engagement. I am desperate enough to break the tie, now that it is too late—now that I dare not offer myself to the girl I love—now that my name is blasted forever. Yes, forever. I know these narrow-minded rustics, and that to the end of my life I shall in their sight bear the brand of Cain. Here is a specimen of liberal feeling, Hilda."

He handed her the rector's letter, crumpled in his angry grasp.

She read it slowly, tears welling up to her eyes as she read. How hardly the world was using this poor Bothwell; and the harder he was used the more she loved him.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I shall kneel before the altar of my God, as I have knelt before."

"There will at least be one communicant there who will not shrink from you," said Hilda, softly. "We will kneel side by side, if you like."

"God bless you, my darling. God help me to clear my name from this foul stain which fools have cast upon it: and then a day may come when you and I may kneel before that altar, side by side, and I may be thrice blessed in winning you for my wife."

There was a brief silence before Hilda murmured, "You have told me that you are bound to another."

"Yes, and I have told you that I will break through that bondage."

"Can you do so with honor?"

"Yes. It will be more honorable to cancel my vow than to keep it. And when I am a free man—when this shadow has been cleared from my name—will you take me for your husband, Hilda—a man with his way to make in the world, but needing only such an inducement as your love to undertake the labors of a new Hercules? Will you have me, Hilda, when I am my own man again?"

"I will," answered Hilda, softly, yet with a firm faith that thrilled him. "I shall have to face my brother's anger, perhaps;

but I will not wait till your name is cleared from this slander. Of what use is fair-weather love? It is in storm and cloud that a woman's faith stands steadfast. When you have freed yourself from that old tie which has grown a weariness to you—when you can come to me in all truth and honor, my heart shall answer frankly and fully, Bothwell. And then you can tell our friends that we are engaged. It may be a very long engagement, perhaps. I shall not be of age till two years hence, you know. But what does that matter. People will know at least that *I* do not suspect you of a crime."

"My noble girl," he cried, beside himself with rapture.

Never had he thought to find any woman so frank, so generous, so brave. He would have caught her in his arms, pressed her to his passionately beating heart, but she drew herself away from him with a quick, decisive gesture.

"Not until you are free, Bothwell, not until you can tell me honestly and truly that the old tie is broken, the old vow canceled. Till then we can be only friends."

"Be it so," he answered, submissively. "Your friendship is worth more than the love of other women. Will you walk to Penmorval with me? Dora has been wondering at your desertion."

"Not to-day. Please tell Dora that I have not been very well. I will go to see her to-morrow. Good-by, Bothwell."

"Good-by, my beloved."

They parted at the gate of the Spaniards.

CHAPTER VII.

A RAPID CONVERSION.

THREE days after that compact between Bothwell and Hilda, an officious friend went out of his way to inform Mr. Heathcote that his sister and Grahame had been seen together several times of late, and that their manner indicated a more than ordinary degree of intimacy. They had been observed together at the early service on Sunday morning; they had sat in the same pew; they had walked away from the church side by side—indeed, Mr. Heathcote's friend believed they had actually walked to the Spaniards together.

"It is a shame that such a man as Captain Grahame should be allowed to be on intimate terms with an innocent young girl," said the worthy rustic, in conclusion.

"My dear Badderly, I hope I am able to take care of my sister without the help of all Bodmin," said Heathcote, shortly. "Everybody is in great haste to condemn Mr. Grahame; but you must not forget that my sister and I have been intimate with him and his family for years. We can not be expected to turn our backs upon him all at once, because his conduct happens to appear somewhat mysterious."

Notwithstanding which kindly word for Bothwell, Edward Heathcote went straight home and questioned his sister as to her dealings with that gentleman.

Hilda admitted that she had seen Bothwell two or three times

within the last week, and that she had allowed him to walk home with her after the early service.

"Do you think it wise or womanly to advertise your friendship with a man who is suspected of a foul crime?" asked her brother, severely.

"I think it wise and womanly to be true to my friends in misfortune—in unmerited misfortune," she answered, firmly.

"You are very strong in your faith. And pray what do you expect will be the end of all this?"

"I expect—I hope—that some day I shall be Bothwell's wife. I shall not be impatient of your control, Edward. I am only nineteen. I hope during the next two years you will find good reason to change your opinion about Bothwell, and to give your consent to our marriage—"

"And if I do not?"

"If you do not, I must take advantage of my liberty when I come of age, and marry him without your consent."

"You have changed your tune, Hilda. A week ago you told me that you and Bothwell would never be married. Now you boldly announce your betrothal to him."

"We are not betrothed—yet."

"Oh, there is a preliminary stage, is there? A kind of purgatory which precedes the heaven of betrothal. Hilda, you are doing a mad and unwomanly thing in giving encouragement to this man, in the face of your brother's warning."

"Am I to be unjust because my brother condemns a friend unheard? No. Trust me, Edward, my instinct is wiser than your experience. Why do you not question Bothwell? He will answer you as frankly as he answered me. He will tell you his reasons for refusing to satisfy that London lawyer's curiosity. Oh, Edward, how can you be so cruel as to doubt him, to harden your heart against him and against me?"

"Not against you, my darling," her brother answered, tenderly. "If I thought your happiness were really at stake, that your heart were really engaged, I would do much; but I can but think you are carried away by a mistaken enthusiasm. You would have never cared for Grahame if the world had not been against him, if he had not appeared to you as a martyr."

"You are wrong there, Edward," she answered, shyly, her fingers playing nervously with the collar of his coat, the darkly-fringed eyelids drooping over the lovely gray eyes. "I have liked him for a long time. Last winter we used to ride together a good deal, you know—"

"I did not know, or I should have taken care to prevent it," said Heathcote.

"Oh, it was always accidental, of course," she apologized. "But in a hunting-country the fast-goers generally get together, don't they?"

"In your case there was some very fast-going, evidently."

"I used to think then that Bothwell cared for me—just a little. And then there came a change. But I know the reason of that change now; and I know that he really loves me."

"Oh, you are monstrous wise, child, and monstrous firm and

self-willed for nineteen years old," said her brother, in those deep grave tones of his, a voice which gave weight and power to the lightest words, "and you would take your own road in life without counting the cost. Well, Hilda, for your sake I will try and get at the root of this mystery. I will try to fathom your lover's secret, and God grant I may discover that it is a far less guilty secret than I have deemed."

He kissed Hilda's downcast brow and left her. She was crying, but her tears were much less bitter than they had been, for she felt that her brother was now on her side; and Edward Heathcote's championship was a tower of strength.

Once having pledged himself to anything, even against his own convictions, Mr. Heathcote was the last man to go from his word; but if he needed a stronger inducement than his sister's sorrowful pleading, that inducement was not wanting.

He received a note from Dora Wyllard within a few hours of his conversation with Hilda:

"DEAR MR. HEATHCOTE,—My husband and I have both been wondering at your desertion of us. For my own part, I want much to see you, and to talk to you upon a very painful subject. Will you call at Penmorval after your ride to-morrow afternoon, and let me have a few words with you alone?

"Always faithfully yours, DOROTHEA WYLLARD."

He kissed the little note before he laid it carefully in a drawer of his writing-table. It was a foolish thing to do, but the act was quite involuntary and half-unconscious. The sight of that handwriting brought back the feeling of that old time when a letter from Dora meant so much for him. He had trained himself to think of her as another man's wife—in friendship, and friendship only. He felt himself bound in honor so to think of her—all the more because he was admitted to her home, because she was not afraid to call him friend. Yet there were moments when the old feeling came over him with irresistible force.

He did not ride that afternoon, but walked across the fields, and presented himself at Penmorval between four and five o'clock. Mrs. Wyllard was alone in her morning-room, a room in which everything seemed a part of herself—her chosen books, her piano, her easel—all the signs of those pursuits which he remembered as the delight of her girlhood.

"You paint still, I see," he said, glancing at the easel, on which there was an unfinished picture of her favorite collie; "you have not forgotten your old taste for animals."

"I have so much leisure," she answered, somewhat sadly, and then he remembered her childless home.

She was very pale, and he thought she had a careworn look, as of one who had spent anxious days and sleepless nights. He took the chair to which she motioned him, and they sat opposite each other for some moments in silence, she looking down and playing nervously with a massive ivory paper-knife which was lying on the table at which she had been writing when he entered. Suddenly she lifted her eyes to his face—those lovely eyes which had looked at him once before in his life with just that pathetic appealing look.

"It is very cruel of you to believe my cousin guilty of murder," she said, coming straight to the point. "You knew my mother. Surely you must know our race well enough to know that it does not produce murderers."

"Who told you that I believed such a thing?"

"Your own actions have told me. Bothwell has been cut by the people about here; and you, who should have been his stanch friend and champion, you have kept away from Penmorval as if it were infected, in order to avoid meeting my cousin."

"I can not tell you a lie, Mrs. Wyllard, even to spare your feelings," replied Heathcote, deeply moved, "and yet I think you must know that I would do much to save you pain. Yes, I must admit that it has seemed to me that circumstances pointed to your cousin as having been directly or indirectly concerned in that girl's death. His conduct became so strange at that date—so difficult to account for upon any other hypothesis."

"Has your experience of life never made you acquainted with strange coincidences?" asked Dora. "Is it impossible, or even improbable, that Bothwell should have some trouble upon his mind—a trouble which arose just about the time of that girl's death? Everything must have a date, and his anxieties happen to date from that time. I know his frank, open nature, and how heavily any secret would weigh upon him."

"You believe, then, that he has a secret?"

"Yes—there is something—some entanglement which prevented his answering Mr. Distin's somewhat impertinent questions."

"Has he confided his trouble to you? Has he convinced you of his innocence?"

"He had no need to do that. I never believed him guilty—I never could believe him guilty of such a diabolical crime."

Tears came into her eyes as she spoke, but she dried them hastily and restrained her emotion resolutely.

"Mr. Heathcote, you are a lawyer, a man of the world, a man of talent and leisure. You have been one of the first to do my kinsman a cruel wrong. Can not you do something toward righting him? I am making this appeal on my account—without Bothwell's knowledge—I come to you as the oldest friend I have—the one friend outside my own home whom I can best trust."

"You know that I would give my life in your service," he answered, with suppressed fervor. He dared not trust himself to say much. "Yes, you have but to command me. I will do all that is possible for human intelligence to do. But it is a difficult case. The only evidence against your cousin is of so vague a nature that it could not condemn him before a jury—but it is strong enough to brand him as a possible murderer in the opinion of those who saw him under Mr. Distin's examination. He can never be thoroughly rehabilitated until the mystery of that poor girl's death has been fathomed, and I doubt if that will ever be. Where George Distin has failed, with all the detective police of London at his command, how can any amateur detective hope to succeed?"

"Friendship may succeed where mere professional cleverness has been baffled," argued Dora. "I do not think that Mr. Distin's heart was in this case. At least, that is the impression I derived

from a few words which I heard him say to my husband just before he left us."

"Indeed. Can you recall those words?"

"Very nearly. He said he had done his best in the matter, and should not attempt to go further. And then with his cynical air he added, 'Let sleeping dogs lie, Wyllard. That is a good old saying.'"

"Don't you think that sounds rather as if he suspected your kinsman, and feared to bring trouble on your family by any further investigation of this dark business?"

"It never struck me in that light," exclaimed Dora, with a distressed look. "Good heavens! is all the world so keen to suspect an innocent man? If you only knew Bothwell as I know him, you would be the first to laugh this vile slander to scorn."

"For your sake I will try and believe in him as firmly as you do," answered Heathcote, "and as Wyllard does, no doubt."

Her countenance fell, and she was silent.

"Your husband knows of this cloud upon your cousin's name, I suppose?" interrogated Heathcote after a pause.

"Yes, I told him how Bothwell had been treated by his Bodmin acquaintances."

"And he was as indignant as you were, I conclude?"

"He said very little," answered Dora, with a pained expression. "My regard for Bothwell is the only subject upon which Julian and I have ever differed. He has been somewhat harsh in his judgment of my cousin ever since his return from India—he disapproved of his leaving the army, and he has been inclined to take a gloomy view of his prospects from the very first."

"I see. He has not a very high opinion of Bothwell's moral character?"

"I would hardly say that. But he is inclined to judge my cousin's errors harshly, and he does not understand his noble qualities as I do. I should not have been constrained to ask for your help if Julian had been as heartily with me in this matter as he has been in all other things."

Edward Heathcote's bronzed cheek blanched ever so little at this speech. It moved him deeply to think that in this one anxiety of her loving heart he could be more to Dora Wyllard than her husband, that she could turn to him in this trouble with boundless confidence in his friendship. What would he not do to merit such confidence—to show himself worthy of such trust. Already he was prepared to be Bothwell's champion; he was angry with himself for ever having suspected him.

"I had another reason for appealing to you," Dora went on, shyly. "I have reason to think that Bothwell is very fond of Hilda—and the dearest wish of my life is to see those two united."

"A wish which is in a fair way of being gratified, unwillingly so far as I am concerned," answered Heathcote. "My sister announced to me only yesterday that there is some kind of contingent engagement between her and Mr. Grahame; and that, he being free to wed her, she means to marry him when she comes of age, with or without my consent."

"My noble Hilda," exclaimed Dora, "yes, it is just like her to accept him now when all the world is against him."

"Say that it is just like a woman," said Heathcote. "There is a leaven of Quixotism in all your sex, from the queen to the wife-beater's victim in Seven Dials. Well, dear Mrs. Wyllard, for your sake and for Hilda's I will be Quixotic. I will make it the business of my life to discovery the mystery of that unknown girl's fate. I will pledge myself to think of nothing else, to undertake no other work or duty until I have exhausted all possible means of discovery."

"God bless you for the promise," she answered, fervently. "I knew that I had one friend in the world."

A sob almost choked her utterance of those last words. She was deeply wounded by her husband's coldness in this matter of Bothwell's position. She had expected him to be as indignant as she was, to be ready to take up arms against all the world for her cousin, and he had been cold, silent, and gloomy when she tried to discuss the burning question with him. His manner had implied that he, too, suspected Bothwell, though he would not go so far as to give utterance to his suspicion.

And now to have won over this strong advocate, this brave, true-hearted champion, was a relief to her mind that almost overcame her feelings; here where she had ever sought to preserve the calm dignity of manner which became her as Julian Wyllard's wife. She recovered herself almost instantly.

"I thank you with all my heart," she said, "and I am sure that my husband will be as rejoiced as I shall if you can clear Bothwell's name from this hideous stigma."

Heathcote rose to take leave. He felt that the business of his visit was accomplished, that he had no right to linger in Dora Wyllard's sanctum. It was the first time he had ever been admitted to her own particular nest, the one room in which she was secure from the possibility of interruption.

"Tell Hilda to come and see me," she said, as they shook hands. "She has deserted me most cruelly of late."

"Perhaps it is better for her not to be here until her engagement to your cousin is on a more definite footing."

"Ah, *there* is the secret in Bothwell's life—some entanglement which he half admitted to me the other day. He said that he was bound to one woman while he loved another. I guessed that Hilda was the one he loved. But who can the other be? I know of no one."

"Some lady whom he met in India, no doubt. The very air of that country is charged with complications of that kind. If your cousin is a man of honor, and if we can unriddle the railway mystery, all may yet come right. Pray do not be too anxious. Good-by."

And so they parted—they, too, who once were to have spent their lives together. Edward Heathcote walked away from Penmorval, loving his old love as dearly as ever he had loved her in his passionate youth. He was young enough to love with youthful fervor even yet, although he had schooled himself to believe that youth

was past for him. He was only thirty-six; Julian Wyllard's junior by nearly ten years.

Half an hour later Dora was presiding at afternoon tea in the yew-tree arbor, where her husband joined her after two hours' business talk with his land-steward. The weather was still warm enough for drinking tea out of doors, and this yew-tree arbor was Mrs. Wyllard's favorite retreat. Most of all she loved it when, as on that day, she could take her tea *tête-à-tête* with her husband.

"How pale and tired you are looking, Julian," said Dora, scrutinizing her husband's face anxiously as he sunk somewhat wearily into the comfortable basket-chair she had placed ready for him; "you must want some tea very badly."

"I always enjoy my afternoon cup, and you are the queen of tea-makers," answered Wyllard; "yes, I have had a tiresome talk with Gretton, who is getting old and prosy, and repeats himself internally when he is describing the tenants' wants and grievances. He can not tell me of the smallest repair wanted to a barn or pig-sty without giving me every syllable of his conversation with some garrulous old farmer, and even explaining the nature of the barn or the style in dumb show, 'as it might be this,' 'and it might be that.' He maddens me with his 'as it might be.'"

"I am afraid you are getting nervous, Julian," said Dora, tenderly.

She laid her cool white hand upon his forehead, and looked concerned at the touch.

"You are actually feverish. You have been irritated into a fever by that poor, prosy old man. Why do you not superannuate Mr. Gretton, and let Bothwell be your steward? He is much cleverer and more business-like than you think, and at the worst he would not prose."

"I never thought Bothwell a fit person to look after my estate, and I think him less so now," answered her husband, coldly. "He is the most unpopular man in Bodmin. Do not let us talk about it any more. By the way, you have had a visitor this afternoon," continued Mr. Wyllard as his wife handed him his tea. "I saw Heathcote go past the library window while I was at work with Gretton. What brought him to Penmorval this afternoon?"

"I asked him to come," answered Dora, very pale, but with a steadfast look in her eyes and about the firmly-molded lips.

She had never had a secret from her husband in her life, and although she had made her appeal to Edward Heathcote without his advice or knowledge, she had no intention of leaving him uninformed now that the thing was done.

"You asked him to come to you! Edward Heathcote!" exclaimed Wyllard, with a surprised look. "And may I know what important business necessitated this interview?"

"You have a right to know all about it, Julian," she answered, quietly. "I have asked Mr. Heathcote to give me his aid in a matter in which you have seemed unwilling to help me. You were content that my cousin should remain under a horrible stigma—shunned by those who were once his friends. I am not so content; and I have asked the son of my mother's oldest and stanchest friend to help me."

And then she told him, as briefly as possible, what kind of request

she had made to Edward Heathcote, and how he had promised to help her.

Julian Wyllard was livid with anger. He set down his cup with a hand that trembled like an aspen leaf; he rose from his chair, and paced the grassy space in front of the arbor backward and forward half a dozen times before he uttered a word. And then, coming back to his wife, he looked at her with eyes in which the savage passion of jealousy blazed like a demoniac fire.

"Why call him the son of your mother's old friend," he exclaimed. "What need of so awkward and ambiguous a phrase? Why not say at once your old lover? It is in that character you have thrown yourself upon him. It is as your old lover that you try to arouse his chivalry—that you urge him to do that which your husband's common sense revolted from. A husband is a reasoning animal, you know. He will only attempt the practical—the possible. But throw your glove to the lions, and your lover will leap into the arena and fight for it! And you take advantage of an unquenchable passion—of a despairing love—to attempt the solution of a problem to which the answer may be a rope round your cousin's neck."

"You have no right to insult me as you have done," said Dora, pale as marble, but calm in her just indignation. "You know that I am your true wife, and that my friendship for Edward Heathcote and his for me is above suspicion. As for my Cousin Bothwell, I know that he has been most unjustly and cruelly suspected of a foul crime, and I will not rest till the true history of that crime has been discovered. Nothing but the discovery of the real murderer can ever set Bothwell right with his fellow-men."

"Then he will have to remain in the wrong," answered Wyllard, savagely. "The mystery which George Distin's training and experience failed to fathom, will never be brought to light by your knight-errant of the Spaniards."

CHAPTER VIII.

A VALUABLE ALLY.

EDWARD HEATHCOTE devoted his every thought to the task which he had taken upon himself. His first achievement must be to discover the name and history of the murdered girl. The clew in his possession was of the slightest; but he was not without a clew.

First, there was the name and address of the baker on the biscuit bags. This gave him an indication of the part of Paris in which the girl must have been living before she started for England; it also indicated that she had left Paris within a few days of her fatal journey westward.

But he had a second clew, and a much better one. Within a week after the adjourned inquest, a farm laborer had brought him a large, oval, silver locket, which he had picked up in the gorge where the girl fell. The spot lay a little way off the direct path to the man's work. Morbid curiosity had impelled him to go and examine the place in the early morning before his daily labor began.

Prowling about among the ferns and crags, he had struck his foot against a glistening object, which proved to be an old silver locket a good deal worn and battered—a double locket, containing a waxen Agnus Dei, and a little lace-bordered picture of the Virgin Mary, the paper worn thin by much handling.

The man carried the locket to the coroner, who rewarded him with half a sovereign, and laid the relic aside in his desk, after a minute examination. It had been attached to a black ribbon, which was worn and old, and had snapped with the jerk of the girl's fall. Upon the locket itself there was not the faintest sign which could lead to the identification of the wearer, but upon the little lace-edged engraving, there were these words neatly written in a fine French penmanship:—

"Souvenir from Sister Gudule, de la Misericorde, to Leonie, Dinan, October, 1879. Child of Jesus, pray for us."

To Edward Heathcote's mind this brief legend indicated three facts. First that the Christian name of the wearer of the locket was Leonie. Secondly, that she had been educated at a convent at Dinan. Thirdly, that she left the convent in October, 1879, and that the little paper had been placed in her locket at parting. The nuns have no valuable gifts to offer their protégées at parting. An engraving of a saint or Blessed Virgin would be the most precious token holy poverty could bestow. This indication of the locket was the clew which Edward Heathcote decided to follow in the first instance. He made his arrangements for leaving England without an hour's delay; but before turning his back upon the Spaniards, he exacted Hilda's promise that she would not see Bothwell Grahame during his absence.

"Mr. Grahame's entanglement with another woman is an all-sufficient reason for your holding yourself aloof from him," said her brother. "When he is free to ask you to be his wife, let him come to me and submit his pretensions to me, as your natural guardian. Perhaps, by that time, I may have succeeded in setting him right with those who now look askance upon him!"

Mr. Heathcote determined to call upon George Distin before he crossed the Channel. He had thought the question out thoroughly, during a sleepless night; and it seemed to him that it would be folly to enter upon his difficult task of investigation without having first armed himself with such advice as the famous criminal lawyer was able to give. Before acting upon his own opinion, it would be well to know the opinion of a disinterested expert.

He called at Mr. Distin's offices the morning after his arrival in London. The offices were in Furnival's Inn, a quiet and convenient spot, not too far from the Old Bailey, and within a ten minutes' walk of the stuffy old law-courts, still extant in Chancery Lane. Mr. Heathcote sent in his card; and although at least half a dozen clients were waiting for Mr. Distin, he was admitted immediately, and received with marked cordiality.

"My dear Mr. Heathcote, charmed to see you. How good of you to look me up," exclaimed Distin, as he pushed forward the most comfortable of morocco-covered arm-chairs.

There was nothing æsthetic, picturesque, or new-fangled in Mr. Distin's office, where the prevailing tone was a sober substantial comfort. Most of the furniture looked at least fifty years old; but the Turkey carpet was the richest that the looms of Orient can produce; the spacious arm-chairs invited to repose, and to that ease of body which favors expansion of mind and friendly candor.

"Are you in town on business or pleasure?" inquired the lawyer, in his airy manner. "Going thro' to the North, perhaps; grouse-moor, eh?"

"Nothing is further from my thoughts than shooting grouse," replied Heathcote. "I am in London on my way to the Continent. I am going to hunt up the antecedents of that poor girl who was killed on our line—find out who she was, and how she came to be in the way of meeting her death in our locality."

The lawyer's airy manner was dropped in a moment, and he became intensely grave.

"Oh, you're going into that business, are you, and so late in the day. But why?"

"I would rather not discuss my motive, if you will kindly excuse me." Mr. Distin bowed. "I want to avail myself of your talent and experience to the uttermost before I begin to work on my own account."

"The uttermost my talent can do for you in this matter is very little; to tell you the truth, I made a dismal failure of the business," returned George Distin, with agreeable frankness. He was too successful a man to be ashamed to confess a failure. "But, really, now, Mr. Heathcote, by far the wisest counsel I can give you is to forget all about this sad story; and to let the world go on just as if the poor girl's death had never come within your ken. You did your duty as a coroner, you know. Nothing more could be asked or expected of you. Why, then, should you do more? You are very friendly with the family at Penmorval. Take my advice. 'Let sleeping dogs lie.'"

"That is what you said to Mr. Wyllard the morning you were leaving."

"I may have used that adage. It is a very good one."

"And you recommend me to drop this investigation, for the sake of my friends at Penmorval," said Heathcote. "I infer from that advice that you suspect Mr. Grahame of some part in the French girl's death."

"I confess to you that his whole manner and conduct were to my mind strongly indicative of guilt. Of course, manner and conduct are not evidence. At this present time there is not a shred of evidence to connect Mr. Grahame with the crime, except the one fact that he was in the train when the girl was killed; but that point would apply equally to everybody else in the train, or rather to anyone who happened to be alone in a carriage, as Mr. Grahame was. At present Mr. Wyllard's cousin is safe. If his was the arm that thrust that girl off the foot-board there is nothing to bring the crime home to him. But go a few steps further, follow up any clew which you may happen to possess—you would not start upon such an investigation without some kind of clew," speculated George Distin, shrewdly—"pursue your trail a few yards further, and you may

come upon evidence that will put a rope round your friend's neck, and bring lasting disgrace upon the family at Penmorval. I advised my old friend Wyllard to let this matter drop. I advise you to do the same."

"I can not act upon your advice. There has been too much mischief done already. Mr. Grahame's refusal to answer your questions about his whereabouts on the day of the murder has condemned him in the minds of his fellow-townsmen. His name is blackened by a terrible suspicion, and I have sworn to clear it, if it can be cleared. If he is guilty—well, he can hardly be worse off with a rope round his neck than he is now, with all his old friends estranged from him. For my own part, in such a case I should infinitely prefer the rope. It would be a short way out of a difficulty."

"My experience of criminals is that when the crisis comes they would rather endure the ignominy than the halter," replied Distin. "Perhaps you have never seen a man within an hour of his being hanged?"

"Thank God I have not been obliged to do that, though I have had to look upon one an hour after."

"Ah, then you do not know to what manhood can descend—how it can grovel before the specter of instant, certain death. Come now, can not I persuade you to think better of your idea of investigating this mysterious business?"

"No. I have promised to do it. I must keep my promise."

"So be it."

And then Mr. Distin discussed the matter freely, with perfect frankness. He told Mr. Heathcote what means he had used to discover the girl's identity on this side of the channel.

"I should have gone further and crossed the water, if I had not seen good reason to desist," he said, when he had explained his plan of inquiry at every likely lodging-house, and how the plan had totally failed.

"But what would you have done on the other side of the water, without any clew?"

"I should have gone across myself and put the case into the hands of Monsieur Drubarte, one of the cleverest police officers in Paris. He would have been instantly on the alert to hear of any application made to the police by the relatives and friends of the missing girl. She could hardly disappear for any length of time without some one being concerned by her disappearance. The application to the police might not occur perhaps until months after her death; but it would be likely to occur sooner or later. And again Monsieur Drubarte has his allies in every quarter of Paris. He hears of events so quickly that it might be supposed he had a network of speaking tubes all over the city. With his help I should have been almost certain to arrive at the identification of the dead girl."

"But I sent three advertisements to each of the best known Paris newspapers," said Heathcote. "How do you account for those advertisements not having been seen by the girl's friends?"

"Because French people of the lower classes are sometimes very illiterate, and live in a very narrow circle. Your papers may not have come within the range of the girl's friends. They would be

likely to apply to the police when time passed and they received no tidings of her. But they would not be likely to see your best known papers—the papers of the upper classes, no doubt. And then your advertisements appeared immediately after the girl's death; at a time when the parents or friends had no reason for feeling alarmed as to her safety."

"That may be so," replied Heathcote, thoughtfully. "I think you can help me very much in my undertaking, Mr. Distin, if you are willing to do it."

"In what way."

"Give me a letter of introduction to this Parisian detective, and let me engage his aid, by and by, when I go to Paris. I shall be happy to pay him liberally for his services."

"Drubarte is no extortioner. He will not fleece you," said Distin. "In fact, the man is a gentleman, in his own particular line. Yes, I will give you a letter of introduction to him with pleasure, since you are bent on pursuing this business to the bitter end. I suppose you will go straight to Paris?"

"No. I want first to follow up the only valuable clew I have. I shall go first to Dinan, in Brittany, to find the convent where I have reason to believe this poor girl was educated."

CHAPTER IX.

FEVER DREAMS.

MR. HEATHCOTE left Waterloo Station for Southampton within an hour of leaving Mr. Distin's office, dined hastily at the Dolphin Hotel, and started for St. Malo in the South-western steamer at seven o'clock in the evening. It was still early on the following morning when he landed on the long stone quay at St. Malo, and the picturesque old granite walls were still flushed with the rosy light of a newly-risen sun. The quaint island citadel, with its exquisite bay and golden sands, had been familiar to Edward Heathcote in the past. He had lingered here to rest after a long ramble in Brittany, and he had an affection for the steep, narrow streets and quaint old houses, with their all-pervading aspect of the seventeenth century, the days of Bourbons and Condés, kings and warriors, princely priests and princely politicians.

Well, as he loved the old-world town, Mr. Heathcote had no intention of loitering there on this September morning, lovely as the bay and the rocks and the smiling colony of white-walled villas yonder at Parame looked in the early sunlight. He only waited to see his portmanteau through the custom house in order to carry it to the little office attached to the Dinan steamer, where he ascertained the hour for the boat's departure.

Chance and tide favored him. The steamer was to leave at eleven o'clock. This afforded time for a leisurely breakfast at the Franklin, and would enable him to reach Dinan early in the afternoon. He breakfasted briefly and temperately, as became a man whose mind was full of anxious thought, and then went for a stroll in the old streets, and looked in at the cathedral.

He had reflected seriously upon his interview with the criminal lawyer. The fact that he had found his own original opinion about Bothwell Grahame shared by this man, so deeply versed in the ways of criminals, in the science of circumstantial evidence, was to the last degree startling and disconcerting. He felt that he was setting out upon a task that he could but perform in a half-hearted manner, struggle as he might against that first conviction of his. He had undertaken this task for Hilda's sake, for Dora's sake. What misery must result if George Distin were right after all, and in an ill-judged attempt to gratify these two trusting women he should bring about the actual discovery of Bothwell's guilt. That guilt was at present but a dark suspicion which men hardly dared hint to each other; but if George Distin's judgment was correct, any unlucky discovery might make the suspicion a fact.

But he had promised, and the pledge must be kept. He must follow up the clew which he held till it led him to other links in the chain of the victim's history; and the chances were that in the victim's history he would find a clew to the murderer's identity.

It was a lovely autumnal noontide, and the gay little town of Dinard, with its gardens rising stage above stage against the hill-side, its queer little bays and recesses of golden sand, was smiling in the sunlight as the "Isle et Rance" steamed across the broad bay of St. Malo to the mouth of the Rance. There are few prettier rivers than this little Rhine of Brittany, and Edward Heathcote had loved it well in days gone by. But to-day he sat upon the bridge smoking his cigar, and gazing at the green hills and hanging woods, the villas and villages, and craggy cliffs and ever-varying shore, without seeing the objects upon which his eyes seemed to rest. The nearer he came to the task of investigation, the more irksome became his duty. His heart failed him as he took out the silver locket, and read the name upon the paper inside. It was the name of the woman who was to enlighten him about the dead girl, who was perhaps to put in his hand the clew which would lead him straight to the murderer.

And yet who could say that he would find Sister Gudule de la Misericorde at Dinan? He did not even know the name of the convent in which she lived. She might be dead. And yet the date of the inscription was but two years old. There was every chance that the sister still lived, and he must be dull if he failed to find her.

He stopped at the first church to which he came after leaving the boat—an old church in the lower part of the town. Here he asked his way to the presbytery, and called upon the priest, who told him that there was only one educational convent in or near Dinan, the Convent of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, an Ursuline convent situated two miles from the town, in the direction of the famous monastery mad-house.

Mr. Heathcote left the portmanteau at one of the hotels in the market-place, and drove at once to the convent, which was beautifully situated amidst the wooded hills on the western side of the town, and commanded a noble view of the valley, and the river and the gray old town with its quaint roofs and many towers. It was a large white building, with plastered walls, far from beautiful in itself, and showing every sign of poverty; but the gardens were

neatly kept, the rooms were exquisitely clean, and the clumsy old Breton furniture was polished to the highest degree.

Mr. Heathcote was received in the convent parlor by the reverend mother, a homely little tub-shaped personage in a black serge habit and a picturesque white cap which concealed every vestige of hair upon her broad, intelligent forehead. She had kindly black eyes and a frank, benevolent smile, and Heathcote felt at once at his ease with her. She looked a little disappointed when, in answer to her preliminary question, he told her that he had not come to offer a new pupil. The pupils were the chief source of revenue for the convent, albeit the *pension* was of the smallest.

"Have you ever seen that locket before, madame?" he asked, laying the silver medallion before the reverend mother.

"I have seen many such," she answered. "The Holy Father allows us to dispose of them for the benefit of the convent."

"There is a little paper inside with some writing. Will you look at it, please?"

She opened the locket and unfolded the paper.

"Yes, this is Sister Gudule's writing. I know it very well indeed," said the nun, looking at her visitor with a curiously puzzled air, as if wondering whether the gentleman had not gone a little astray, his real destination being the great monastic mad-house yonder on the crest of an opposite hill.

"Sister Gudule is still living—still with you, perhaps?"

"Yes?" interrogatively.

"And you remember Leonie, to whom that little picture was given?"

The reverend mother smiled her modest smile.

"Leonie is not an uncommon name," she replied. "We have had many pupils so called from time to time. Our school numbers over a hundred and fifty pupils, you must remember."

"Do you recall any pupil of that name who left you two years ago?" asked Heathcote.

"We have from thirty to forty pupils leaving us every year. Will you permit me to ask the object of your inquiry?"

"It is a very serious one, or I should be desolated to give you so much trouble," answered Heathcote, courteously, in that polite language which he spoke almost as fluently as his native English. "The poor girl to whom that locket belonged met her death in my neighborhood less than two months ago. She fell from a railway-carriage as the train was crossing a viaduct. Whether that death was accidental or the result of a crime, remains as yet unknown. But there are those in my country to whom it is vital that the whole truth should be known. If you can help me to discover the truth, you will be helping the cause of justice."

"Sister Gudule will remember," said the reverend mother, ringing a bell. "She is one of our lay sisters, a great favorite with all the children. She nurses them when they are ill, and takes care of them when they go out for a holiday, and plays with them as if she were a child herself."

A lay sister, the portress, answered the bell, and went in quest of Sister Gudule.

"She has a very unprepossessing appearance," said the reverend

mother. "I fear you may be a little shocked at first seeing her, but she is so amiable that we all adore her. She has been the victim of misfortune from her cradle. Her deformity is the consequence of a nurse's carelessness. It turned the heart of her mother from her, and she was a neglected and unloved child. Her family was noble, but the husband speculated in railways, and the wife was silly and extravagant. By the time Gudule was a young woman, poverty had overtaken her father; and he was only too glad to acquiesce in the girl's resolution to enter a convent. She came to us penniless thirty years ago, and has worked for her bread ever since. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that she is the most valuable member of our community."

The door was opened softly, and Sister Gudule appeared. This little preface from the reverend mother had not been unnecessary to lessen the shock of her personal appearance, which was startling in its unqualified ugliness.

Sister Gudule de la Misericorde was the very type of the wicked fairy in the dear old child stories. She was short and squat, with broad shoulders and a decided hump. She had a nose like a potato, and a lower lip like that of the lady who moistened the spinster's yarn; she had an undeniable mustache and beard; but, in spite of all, there was something pleasant, conciliating, reassuring, in her face. The low, broad forehead suggested intellectual power; there was a humorous twinkle in the small gray eyes, as of one who could revel in a joke; the thick under-lip and prominent under-jaw were the indications of a boundless benevolence.

The reverend mother handed the locket and its inclosure to Sister Gudule.

"I must tell you that the sister has a most miraculous memory," she said confidentially to Heathcote. "I have never known her forget the most trivial event in the history of our lives. She is our unwritten calendar."

"It is Leonie Lemarque's locket," said Sister Gudule. "How came it here? Is my little Leonie in Dinan?"

"Leonie Lemarque." How glibly she pronounced the name, and how strange it seemed to Edward Heathcote to hear it. Like a name out of a tomb.

"The owner of that locket is dead," he answered, gently.

"Dead. Leonie Lemarque. Dead at nineteen years old! Dead! Why, there was not a healthier child in the convent after we had once built up her constitution. She was in a sad way when she came to us."

"Leonie Lemarque," repeated the reverend mother; "I never thought of her when monsieur showed me the locket. Leonie Lemarque! Yes, she left us in 1879 to go to her old grandmother in Paris. And now she has met with a violent death in England. Monsieur will tell you."

Monsieur repeated his story, this time with further details, for Sister Gudule questioned him closely. She would have every particular. The tears streamed down her cheeks, and hung upon her bristly mustache. She was deeply distressed.

"You don't know how I loved that child," she said, excusing herself to the Superior, and then to Heathcote, "Ah, monsieur, you

could never understand how I loved her. I saved her life. From the weakest, frailest creature I made her a sound and healthy child. Indeed, I may say that I did much more than this. With the help of God and his saints I saved her mind."

"It is quite true," said the reverend mother. "The child came to us under peculiar circumstances. Sister Gudule took entire charge of her for the first six months."

"And she rewarded me for my trouble," added Gudule, "she gave me love for love, measure for measure."

"Will you tell me all about her—every detail? The knowledge may help me to avenge her death," said Heathcote, eagerly. 'It is my belief, and that of others, that she was foully murdered."

He was intensely agitated. He felt as it he had taken into his hand the lever which worked some formidable machine—an instrument of death and doom, and that every movement of his hand might bring destruction. Yet the process once begun must go on. He was no longer an individual working of his own free will: he was only an agent in the hands of Fate.

"Willingly, we will tell you all we can," said the reverend mother. "But you must allow us to offer you a little coffee. You have traveled, and you look white and weary."

The convent was proud of its coffee, almost the only refreshment ever offered to visitors. The portress brought a little oval tray covered with a snow-white napkin, a little brown earthen pot, a white cup and saucer—all of the humblest, but spotlessly clean.

"Leonie was with us seven years," said the reverend mother, while Sister Gudule dried her eyes and tried to regain her composure. "She was just ten years old when she was brought to us by her grandmother, a person who had been at one time a dressmaker in one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris, but who had fallen upon evil days, and lived in a very humble way in a small lodging on the left bank of the Seine. Leonie was an orphan, the daughter of Madame Lemarque's only son, who died young, broken-hearted at the death of his young wife. The child was brought to us by a priest, who came all the way from Paris with his little charge. She had but just recovered from a long illness, which was said to be brain fever, caused by a very terrible mental shock which she had endured two months before."

"Were you told the nature of that shock?"

"No; the priest did not offer any information upon that point, and I did not presume to question him. He assured me that the case was one which merited the most benevolent consideration. Madame Lemarque had no means of educating the child herself, nor could she afford the pension demanded by a Parisian convent. The curé thought that our fine air would do much to restore the child to health and strength, and he knew that our system of education was calculated to develop her mind and character in the right direction. He guaranteed the regular payment of the child's pension, and we never had occasion to apply for it a second time."

"Did Madame Lemarque ever come to see her granddaughter?"

"Never. Leonie remained with us from year's end to year's end till after her seventeenth birthday, when, at Madame Lemarque's

desire, we made arrangements for her traveling to Paris with other pupils who were returning to the great city."

"Then you never saw Madame Lemarque?"

"Never."

"Nor ever heard from her directly?"

"Oh, yes, we had letters—very nicely-written letters—full of gratitude for what Madame Lemarque was pleased to call our kindness to Leonie. The child used to write to her grandmother monthly, and her letters were the best evidence that she was fairly used and happy."

"She was a sweet child," said Gudule, "and deserved every indulgence."

"Did she ever tell you anything about the shock which caused her illness?" asked Heathcote of the lay sister.

"In her right senses never one syllable," answered Gudule. "I would not have questioned her upon that subject for worlds, for I believed that she had narrowly escaped madness. But during the six months in which I nursed her—for her health was completely broken, and it required all that time to build up her strength and calm her nerves—she used to sleep in a little bed close to mine, and in her troubled dreams I used to hear very strange things. How far the dreams were inspired by the recollections of real events I can not say, but there were phrases that recurred so often, a horrible vision which so continually repeated itself, like a scene in a play, that I can but suppose it to have been the representation of some event which had really happened before the child's waking eyes."

"Can you recall the nature of the vision?" inquired Heathcote, breathlessly.

It seemed to him that he was on the threshold of a new mystery—as terrible as the old one, and even darker as a tragedy hidden in the past, effected only in a child's fever-dream.

"You should ask me if I can forget it, monsieur?" said Sister Gudule. "I wish with all my heart that I could. I have prayed many a prayer for forgetfulness. The poor child used to be slightly feverish every night—a low fever, which only came on in the evening, but some nights were worse than others—and in her most feverish nights this dream seemed almost inevitable. I used to lie awake expecting it, dreading it."

"She used to talk in her sleep, then?"

"To talk, yes. And to scream—a terrible shriek sometimes, which would disturb every sleeper in the great dormitory adjoining my little room. She would start up on her pillow, and stare straight before her with wide open eyes, being fast asleep all the same, you understand. 'Don't kill her, don't kill her,' she would cry: 'don't shoot her.' And then she would rock herself backward and forward, and moan in a low voice, 'The forest, the dark, dark forest—take away the blood!' Her words varied sometimes, but those words never—'Take away the dark forest—take away the blood!'"

"And did she ever tell you what the dream meant—you, her nurse and comforter, with whom she must have been on such confidential terms?"

"No; dear child. She loved me and trusted me with all the strength of her innocent heart, I believe; but she never told me the

cause of that awful dream. And I never dared to question her. I was only anxious that she should forget the past—that if her nights were fevered and restless, her days would be peaceful and bright. I did everything I could to amuse and interest her, in studies, needlework, and play, and to help her to forget the past."

"And you succeeded, sister," said the head of the convent, approvingly. "I never saw a more wonderful cure. From a nervous, hysterical child Leonie Lemarque grew into a bright, merry girl."

"Yes, with God's help she was cured, but the cure was very slow. The shock which shattered her health and for a time impaired her mind must have been an awful one. Never before had I seen gray hairs upon the head of a child, but the thickly curling hair upon Leonie's temples when she came to us was patched with white, and it was years before the hair resumed its natural color. For the first year her memory was almost a blank. It would have been useless for any one to attempt to teach her in class with the other children. She would been despised as an idiot, laughed at perhaps and her heart broken. I obtained the reverend mother's permission to keep her in my room, and to teach her in my own way, and little by little I awakened her memory and her mind. Both had been as it were benumbed, frozen, paralyzed, by that awful shock of which we know so little."

"But you would guess that she had witnessed some dreadful scene, perhaps the death of some one she loved," speculated Heathcote. "Did she never talk to you of her childhood in Paris, her relatives?"

"Rarely of any one except her grandmother," answered Sister Gudule; "and of her she told me very little. Whether her illness had blotted out the memory of her childhood, or whether she shrunk from any allusion to the past, I can not tell. One day I asked her who had given her a blue satin neckerchief which I found in her trunk—a costly neckerchief, and much too fine for a child to wear. She told me that it was a New Year's gift from her aunt, but at the mention of the name she turned deadly pale, her eyes filled with tears, and her whole body shook like an aspen leaf. I changed the conversation that moment, and I never again heard her mention her aunt."

"You would infer from her agitation that the aunt was connected with the tragedy of the child's life?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Was perhaps the person whom she saw assailed when she cried out, 'Don't kill her; don't shoot her'?"

"I have thought that it must have been so. That dreadful cry of hers, 'Take away the blood—take away the dark forest!' No one who did not hear those cries of hers, no one who did not see the awful expression of her eyes—staring, dilated, full of horror; no one who had not seen and heard her as I did, could ever understand how dreadful, how real that vision was to me as well as to the sleeper. I used to feel as if I had seen murder done, and had been powerless to prevent it."

"In a word, you felt, by pure sympathy, almost exactly what the child felt?" said Heathcote.

Already he had begun to adore Sister Gudule, just as the children

of the convent adored her. He forgot her hump, he forgave her the potato-shaped nose, he accepted her beard as a detail that gave piquancy to her countenance. He was subdued, subjugated by that intensely sympathetic nature which revealed itself in every word and look of the lay sister.

But he had a task to perform, and it was necessary that he should proceed with his inquiries in a business-like manner. He had already taken certain notes in his pocket-book.

"Leonie Lemarque left you in 1879, and she had been with you seven years," he said, with a pencil in hand. "She must have come to you in 1872?"

"Yes, it was in 1872, not long after the troubles in Paris. It was early in November she was brought to us."

"And you were told that she had been ill two months in consequence of a mental shock?"

"Yes."

"Then one may fairly conclude that the event which caused her illness occurred early in the September of 1872?"

"I think so."

"Good. I thank you most heartily, madame," with a courteous bow to the reverend mother, "for the help you and Sister Gudule have so graciously bestowed upon me. But I would venture to ask a further favor, namely, that you would honor me with a line by way of introduction to the worthy priest who brought Leonie Lemarque from Paris."

"Alas, monsieur, that is impossible. Father Sorbier died three years ago, just a year before Leonie left us."

"That is unfortunate. He doubtless knew the mystery of the girl's childhood, and perhaps might have helped me to unravel the secret of her strange death."

"Do you really believe that the two events have any bearing upon each other, monsieur?" demanded Sister Gudule, thoughtfully.

"I know not, madame," replied Heathcote, "but it is only by working backward that I can hope to arrive at any clew to the mystery which has puzzled us all in Cornwall. That poor girl must have had some purpose in going to England, in traveling to so remote a neighborhood as ours. Even if her death were an accident, or an unpremeditated crime, her presence in that place can not have been accidental."

Mr. Heathcote asked to see the class-rooms and the chapel before he left the convent, a request which was graciously accepted, as a compliment to the reverend mother. He was paraded along wide and airy passages, was shown an empty refectory, where plates and mugs, huge piles of bread and butter were arrayed on long deal tables, covered with snow-white linen, in readiness for the afternoon *gouter*. He saw the chapel with its humble decorations, its somewhat crude copy of a well-known Guido, its altar rich in gilded paper, home-made lace, and cheap china vases. All here spoke of small means, but the flowers on the altar were freshly gathered, and the neatness and cleanliness of all things in chapel and convent charmed the stranger's eye. He had slipped a couple of sovereigns into the box by the door, praised the airy corridors, the spacious

white-washed rooms, and left the principal and the lay sister alike charmed with his good French and his friendly manners.

The clock of the monastery on the opposite hill was chiming five as he drove away from the convent, a silvery chime to be heard as far as Dinan.

He dined at the *table-d'hôte* at the Hotel de la Poste, and walked on the terrace on the town walls after dinner. There is no fairer view in Brittany than the panorama of wooded hills from that walk above the town walls. The cool night air, the silvery moonlight soothed Edward Heathcote's nerves. He was able to meditate upon his afternoon's work, to think over the story he had heard from Sister Gudule, and to speculate upon the chances of his being able to follow up this thread of a life history until it led him to some point which would throw light upon the mystery of Leonie Lemarque's death.

Reflecting upon Sister Gudule's story, he could but conclude that the child Leonie had been the witness of some scene of violence in which a woman had been the victim—a murder possibly, or it might be only an attempted murder. Blood had been spilled—for that awful cry, "Take away the blood, take away the dark forest"—a child's appeal to some unknown power to remove an object of terror.

One and one only clew had he obtained from Sister Gudule as to the person of the victim, and even that indication might be a false light leading him astray.

The girl's painful emotion at the utterance of her aunt's name suggested that the victim had been that aunt. The mere mention of that name would conjure up all the horror of that scene which had so nearly wrecked the child's reason.

It, therefore, seemed plain to Edward Heathcote's mind that a murder, or an attempt at murder, had been committed in a dark wood, and that the victim had been Leonie Lemarque's aunt. So deeply interested was he in this mystery of ten years back, so powerfully moved by this strange story of a child's suffering, that he almost forgot that the business which had brought him across the Channel was to find out the true story of the French girl's death, and not to unravel the mystery of this old and perhaps forgotten crime in the unknown wood. So interested was he that he resolved at any cost of trouble to himself to discover the details of the scene reproduced so often in the child's fevered dreams.

"Who knows whether that may not be the surest way of arriving at the truth about the girl's death?" he argued with himself. "At any rate, it is the only way that offers itself at present."

He walked late upon the walls of Dinan, enjoying the quiet of the moonlit scene, hearing the bells chime again and again, silver clear across the vale, from the monastery where the madmen were dreaming their fevered dreams, or wandering sane and heated in the spirit-land of the past amid the faces of friends long dead. He walked late, thinking of a face that had looked at him with trusting eyes in a moment of parting, lovely eyes whose every expression he knew, but most of all that tender pathetic look which had once tried to soothe the agony of loss.

"To serve her and work for her, surely that is enough for a

man's bliss," he thought, with a half satirical smile. "In the good old days of chivalry her knight would have deemed it happiness to bleed and perish for her sake far away in Palestine—glory and honor enough to have worn her colors in his helmet. Are we a meaner race, we men of the present, that we can not love without hope of reward? Well, I have pledged myself to my crusade. I have put on my lady's colors, and I will work for her as faithfully as if my love were not hopeless. I will prove to her that there is some chivalry still left, in this degenerate world, under the modern guise of disinterested friendship."

He started for Paris by the first train next morning, a fourteen hours' journey, a journey of dust and weariness, though the roads lay through a fair country, with frequent glimpses of the blue sea, and then by the broad widening river till the tall houses and the many church towers of the great city glimmered whitely before him under the September noon. He put up at his old resting-place, the Hotel de Bade, amidst the roar and bustle of the Boulevard, and he set out the next morning after an early breakfast in quest of M. Drubarde's apartment, which was situated in that older and shabbier Paris of the left bank.

M. Drubarde's apartment was on the Quai des Grands Augustins, *au cinquièmes*, a rather alarming indication to infirm or elderly legs, but which did not appall Edward Heathcote. He ran lightly up the five flights of a dark wooden staircase, and found himself upon an airy landing, lighted and ventilated by a skylight.

The skylight was half open, and through it Mr. Heathcote saw flowers and greenery upon the roof. He also caught the odor of a very decent cigar, which the soft west wind blew toward him through the same opening.

On a door opposite the top of the steep fifth flight appeared a brass plate, with the name, Felix Drubarde.

He rang, and his summons was answered almost instantly from an unexpected direction.

A large, round, rubicund face peered through the skylight, and a voice asked if monsieur desired an interview with Felix Drubarde.

"I have come here in that hope, monsieur," answered Heathcote, "and I venture to infer that I have the honor of addressing Monsieur Drubarde."

"I am that individual, monsieur," replied the rubicund gentleman, opening the skylight to its widest extent. "Would it be too much to ask you to ascend to my summer *salon* upon the leads? It is pleasanter even for a business interview than the confinement of four walls."

There was a steep straight ladder against the wall immediately upon the skylight. Mr. Heathcote mounted this, and emerged upon the roof, face to face with Felix Drubarde.

The retired police-officer's appearance was essentially rustic. His attire resembled the holiday costume of the *station des baines* rather than the normal garb of a great, busy metropolis. He was clothed from head to foot in white linen, his garments were all of the loosest, and he wore a pair of ancient buff slippers, which had doubtless often trodden the bitter, biting foam on the beach of Dieppe, or the sands of Trouville. Altogether M. Dubarde looked the very pict-

ure of comfort and coolness on this warm September morning. He had made for himself a garden upon a fair open space of flat leaded roof, which was belted round with chimney-stacks of all shapes and sizes, just as a lawn is girdled with good old oaks and beeches. On one side of his garden he had rigged up a lattice work from chimney to chimney, and his nasturtiums and Virginia creepers had clothed the lattice with green and gold. This he called his *allée verte*, and he declared that it reminded him of Fontainebleau in the days of the famous Diana.

His open garden was gorgeous with geraniums and roses and perfumed with mignonette and honeysuckle. He had his morning coffee on a little iron table, he had a wicker-work easy-chair for himself, and another for a friend, and a smart rug, of the usual gaudy pattern to be seen in French lodging-houses, was spread for his slippered feet. He had his cigars, and his newspaper, and, above all, he had a large and ancient black poodle, of uncanny aspect, which looked as if he were the very dog under whose aspect the arch-fiend visited Dr. Faustus.

Before seating himself in the basket-chair which M. Drubarde offered him, Mr. Heathcote took George Distin's letter out of his pocket-book, and handed it to the ex-police officer, who became convulsive with rapture when he saw the signature.

"Monsieur was welcome on his own account as a doubtless distinguished Englishman; as the friend of Monsieur Distin he is more than welcome. His visit is an honor, a privilege, which an old member of the Paris police can not too highly value," said Drubarde, with enthusiasm. "Ah, monsieur, what a man is that George Distin! what a commanding genius! I have had the honor to assist him in cases where that mighty genius revealed itself with startling force, and where I am ,proud to say, he must inevitably have failed but for my humble assistance. Yes, monsieur, old Drubarde has a *flair* which even your great English lawyer envies. What a man, all the same!" M. Drubarde paused for breath, and also to offer Mr. Heathcote a cigar, which was frankly accepted. And then the police-officer continued his eulogy of the English lawyer, with which he contrived to interweave a little gentle egotism.

"Had he been a Frenchman, and lived under the first emperor, he would have been greater than the Duke of Otranto, whom my father had the privilege to serve, and whom I remember seeing when I was a child. My father took me into the great chief's office one day, a little toddling creature, chubby, and, I am told, beautiful, in my blue uniform of the old guard, a mother's fond fancy, monsieur; the mothers of France love to dress their children as toys. The duke laid his hand upon my golden hair. 'What a lovely boy,' he exclaimed, deeply moved by my infantine beauty. 'I prophesy a brilliant future for him. This child will go far.' I hope, monsieur, that his after-life has not belied the great man's prophecy."

"Mr. Distin assures me that you have won distinction in your calling," replied Heathcote, wondering how long the old gentleman's recollections of childhood were going to last. "Your narrative takes me back to a period that is classical. It assures me also that you who so vividly remember the events of sixty years ago—"

"More than sixty, monsieur. I am past seventy years of age, I who speak to you."

Mr. Heathcote put on an appropriate expression of wonder.

"With such a memory for the remote past, it will hardly trouble you to recall the events of ten years ago," he continued, very eager to come to the point. "Now, exactly ten years ago, in this very month of September, there was a brutal murder, or attempted murder, of a woman in a wood near Paris—"

"Do you mean the murder of Marie Prévol, the actress, in the forest of Saint Germain?" inquired the police-officer. "I was engaged in that case. A very strange story."

"And the woman was really murdered?" asked Heathcote, pale with agitation.

He was confounded by the ease with which the man fixed upon a notorious crime upon a given date. It would have surprised him less to find that the child's vision of murder was a mere fever dream —the repetition of one morbid hallucination—than to hear of the reality, here, off-hand, in the broad light of day.

"Really murdered! yes, and her lover too, as dead as the Pharaohs. There never was a more real crime, a more determined, audacious murder. The actress and her lover had gone to Saint German for a holiday jaunt. They went by rail, dined at the Henri Quatre, hired a carriage in the cool of the evening, drove on the terrace, and then into the forest. They left the carriage at a point where there were cross-roads, and pursued their ramble on foot."

"There was a child with them?" interrogated Heathcote, breathlessly.

"Yes, a little girl, the actress's niece. She was the only witness of the crime. It was from her lips that the *Juge d'Instruction* took down the history of the scene. They were walking quietly in the twilight, it was nearly dark, the child said, and she was beginning to feel frightened. The lovers were walking arm in arm, the child by her aunt's side. Suddenly a man sprung out upon them from the darkness of the wood, and confronted them with a pistol in his hand. He wore no hat, and he looked wild and furious. He aimed first at the man, who fell without a groan. The girl had just time to call out to him not to shoot her aunt when he fired a second time, and then a third and a fourth, and again, quicker than the child could count. It was evidently a six-chambered revolver. Marie Prévol was found with her breast riddled with bullets. The driver heard the shots from his post at the cross-roads."

"And was the murderer never found?"

"No. In spite of his weird appearance, his bare head, he got clean off, and all the police of Paris failed in tracing him."

"But was there no one suspected of the crime?"

"Yes. There was a former lover of Marie's, her first lover, and, as it was said, the only man she had ever really cared for. They had been a devoted couple—were supposed by some to be married —and until a short time before the murder Marie's character had been considered almost stainless. Then a younger admirer appeared on the scene. There were violent quarrels. The actress seemed to have lost her head, to be infatuated by this aristocratic lover, one of the handsomest men in Paris. She had known him only a few

months when they went for this jaunt to St. Germain—a stolen adventure. They were supposed to have been followed by the other man, and that the murder was an act of jealous madness."

"And the crime was never brought home to him?"

"Never. Beyond the fact of his relations with Mademoiselle Prévol, and of his disappearance immediately after the murder, there was nothing to connect him with the crime."

"I thought it was difficult—indeed almost impossible—for any man to leave France without the knowledge of the police."

"It is difficult; and at that time it was particularly difficult, as the crimes of the Commune were still of recent date, and the police were more than usually alert. But this man did it. All the great railway stations and the seaports were closely watched for the appearance of such a man among the departures, but he was never identified."

"And you have no doubt in your own mind that this man was the murderer?"

"Not the shadow of doubt. There was no one else who had any motive for assailing Marie and her admirer. Except in her relation with these two she had been propriety itself. Unless you can imagine a motiveless maniac dashing through a wood and shooting the first comer, you can hardly conceive any other cause than jealousy for such a crime as this."

"Do you remember the name of the man who was suspected?"

"Not at this moment; but I have the whole history of the case in my workshop below, and if you would like to read it there are details that might interest you."

"I should like much to read it."

CHAPTER X.

"TOUCH LIPS AND PART WITH TEARS."

WHILE Edward Heathcote was on the other side of the Channel trying to find a solution for the problem of Leonie Lemarque's death, which should also be a complete acquittal of Bothwell Grahame, that gentleman was trying to solve his own particular problem, that grand perplexity of his social life, which had weighed upon him more or less heavily for the last three years. He had been to Plymouth twice since his decisive interview with Hilda; and on each occasion it had been impossible for him to obtain so much as five minutes' *tête-à tête* with the lady he went to see; and that which he had to say to her could not be said in five minutes, or in five times five minutes. And now, while his champion was faithfully toiling in his interests, and while Hilda was giving him all her thoughts and most of her prayers, Bothwell set out on his familiar Plymouth journey for the third time within ten days, and with a letter in his pocket which held out the hope of an opportunity for confidential talk.

"You looked miserable the last time you were here," wrote the lady, "and you looked as if you had something very serious to say to me. I am bored to death by the general's hangers-on—he is

much too kind to the nobodies who besiege us here—and I hardly ever know what it is to be alone. But if you will come to-morrow I will take care to keep other people out. I shall pretend a headache, and deny myself to everybody. You must walk boldly in by the garden, contrive not to meet any of the servants, and you will find me sitting in the colonnade. It will all seem accidental. When the general comes to his afternoon tea he will find you there, and we shall tell him how you wandered in, and escaped the *consigne*. You are such a favorite that he will smile at a liberty from you which he would be the first to resent in any one else."

Bothwell sat in his corner of the railway carriage, meditating upon this letter in his breast pocket. How hard and cruel and false and mean the whole tone of the lady's correspondence seemed to him, now that the glamor of a fatal infatuation had passed from his brain and his senses; now that he was able to estimate the enchantress at her real value, now that his newly-awakened conscience had shown him the true color of his conduct during the last three years. Three years ago a stroke of good fortune had happened to him one day in the hill-country when he and his brother officers had gone out after big game. It had been his chance to save the life of one of the most distinguished men in the service, General Harborough, a man who at that time occupied an important official position in the Bengal Presidency. Bothwell's presence of mind, courage, and rapid use of a revolver had saved the general from the jaws of a leopard, which had crept upon the party while they were resting at luncheon, after a long morning's wild boar shooting. General Harborough was the last man to forget such a service. He took Bothwell Grahame under his protection from that hour, introduced him to his wife, Lord Lostwithiel's daughter, and one of the most elegant women in the Presidency.

Favored by such friends, Bothwell Grahame's life in India became a kind of triumph. He was good-looking, well mannered, a first-rate shot, and an exceptional horseman. He could sing a part in a glee or duet, and he waltzed to perfection. He was supposed to have a genius for waltzing, and to become master of every new step as if by a kind of inspiration. "What is the last fashionable waltz in London?" people asked him, and he showed them the very latest glide, or swoop, or twist, as the case might be. His friends told him all about them in their letters, he said. He always knew what was going on in the dancing world.

Such a man, not too young nor yet too old—neither a stripling nor a fogy—chivalrous, amiable, full of verve and enjoyment of life, was eminently adapted to the holiday existence at Simla, and it was at Simla that Bothwell Grahame became in a manner the fashion, looked up to by all the young men of his acquaintance, petted by all the women. Nor did it appear strange in the eyes of society that Lady Valeria Harborough should be particularly kind to him, and should have him very often at her bungalow, which was the center of all that was gay, and elegant, and *spirituel* in the district. All the Simla jokes originated at the Harborough bungalow. All the latest English fashions, the newest refinements in the service of a dinner table, or the arrangement afternoon tea, came

from the same source. Lady Valeria led the fashion, gave the note of taste throughout that particular section of Indian society.

No, there was nothing exceptional in her kindness to Captain Grahame. In the first place, he had saved her husband from being clawed and mangled to death by a wild beast, a service for which a good wife would be naturally grateful; and, in the second place, Bothwell was only one of a court of young men who surrounded Lady Valeria wherever she happened to be living—but most of all up at the hills, where there was more leisure for chivalry. She always spoke of them as boys, and frankly admitted that she liked their admiration on account of its *naïveté*.

For some time she talked of Bothwell Grahame as a "nice boy," in spite of his thirty years. She herself owned pensively to seven and twenty. Tergiversation would have been vain, since the peerage was open to all her friends, with its dry-as-dust record, "Valeria Hermoine, born 1854."

She was twenty-seven years of age, striking elegant and interesting, if not actually handsome, and she had been two years married to a man who had lately celebrated his sixty-seventh birthday. She had accepted the general and his splendid settlements, meekly enough. There had been no undue persuasion, no domestic tyranny. Her suitor was a perfect gentleman, wealthy, distinguished, and she was told that he could give her all good things which a woman need care to possess. She would spend two or three years with him in India, where he had an important official appointment, and then she would return to England, where he had two country seats—a villa near Plymouth and a castle in Scotland—and a house in Grosvenor Square. As one of seven sisters, it became her to accept the fortune that had fallen into her lap. She was, or she seemed to be, of a temperament that could be happy in a union with a man old enough to be her grandfather. She seemed one of those women born to shine and to rule, rather than to love. No one who knew her intimately feared any evil consequences from her marriage with the elderly soldier.

"Valeria will make General Harborough an admirable wife," said the matrons and ancient maidens of the house of Lostwithiel, "and she will be a splendid mistress for that fine old feudal castle in Perthshire."

Valeria had never known what passionate feeling meant till she gave her friendship to Bothwell Grahame. She had never thrilled at a man's voice, or listened for a man's footstep till she began to start at *his* voice and listen for *his* tread. The fatal love came upon her like a fever, struck her down in the strength of her proud womanhood, made her oblivious of duty, blind to honor, mastered her like a demoniac possession, and from a spotless wife she became all at once an actress and an intriguer.

Oh, those fatal days at Simla, the long, idle afternoons. The music and singing—the dances late in the night when cool winds were blowing over the hills—the garden lit with lamps like glow-worms—the billiards and laughter—the light jests, the heavy sighs. There came a time when Bothwell Grahame found himself bound by an iniquitous tie to the wife of his most generous friend.

Their love was to be guiltless always—that is to say, not the kind

of love which would bring Lady Valeria Harborough within the jurisdiction of the divorce court; not the kind of love which would make her name a scandal and disgrace in the ears of all her English friends, a theme for scorn and scoffing in Bengal. But, short of such guilt as this—short of stolen meetings and base allies, the connivance of servants, the willful blindness of hotel-keepers—short of actual shame and disgrace, they were to be lovers. He was to be at her beck and call—to devote all the leisure of his days to her society—to give not one thought to any other woman—to wait patiently, were it ten years or twenty years, for the good old man's death; and then, after her ceremonial year of widowhood, all deference to the world's opinion having been paid, he was to claim Lady Valeria for his wife. This was the scheme of life to which Bothwell Grahame had pledged himself. For all the best years of his manhood he was to be a hypocrite and an ingrate—the slave of a woman whose rule he dared not acknowledge, waiting for a good man's death. That was the worst degradation of all to a man of warm heart and generous feeling. All that was best and bravest in Bothwell Grahame's nature kept his mind in perpetual revolt against the baseness of his position. To grasp General Harborough's hand and to remember how coldly he and Valeria had calculated the years which the good old man had yet to live, had speculated upon the end drawing near, coming suddenly, perhaps; to know that all their hopes of happiness were based upon the husband's speedy death. There were times, even in the first red dawn of passion, while he was proudest of this woman's love, when he almost hated her for her disloyalty as a wife. Could there be happiness or peace in a bond so made? And then the woman's fascination, the absolute power of a passionate, resolute character over a weak and yielding one, vanquished all his scruples, stifled the voice of conscience and honor. Not Samson at the feet of Delilah was more completely a slave than Bothwell in that luxurious idleness of the Indian hills, when the only purpose life held seemed to be the desire to get the maximum of frivolous amusement out of every day. There was no pastime too childish for Lady Valeria and her admirers, no sport too inane. Yet the lady contrived to maintain her womanly dignity even in the most infantine amusements, and was honored as a queen by all her little court of worshipers, from the bearded major or the portly lawyer to the callowest subaltern.

Bothwell's conduct toward her, and the lady's manner to him, were irreproachable. If there were any difference, she was a shade colder and more reserved in her treatment of him than of her other slaves, but there were moments, briefest opportunities, a *tête-à-tête* of five minutes in a moonlit veranda, a little walk down to the fountain, a ride in which they too were ahead of the rest just for a few yards; moments when Valeria's impassioned soul poured forth its treasures of love at this man's feet, with the utter unreserve of a woman who risks all upon one cast of the die. She, who had been deemed the coldest and proudest of women—Diana not more chaste, an iceberg not more cold—she, Valeria Harborough, had chosen to fall madly in love with a man who was her social inferior, and who had tried his uttermost to escape from the net she had spread for him. Yes, he had not yielded willingly. He had fought the good

fight, had tried his hardest to be loyal and true. And then in one moment the spell had been too strong for his manhood. One never-to-be-forgotten night, they two standing beside the fountain, steeped in the golden light of the southern stars, he had yielded himself up to the enchantment of the hour, to the witchery of luminous violet eyes, brighter for a veil of tears. He had drawn her suddenly to his heart, asked her passionately why she had made him adore her, in spite of himself, against reason and honor; and she, with tearful eyes looking up at him, had answered softly, "Because it was my fate to love you," and then she told him in short, disjointed sentences, broken by sobs, that she was not a wicked woman, that he must not scorn or loathe her, even if he could not give her love for love. Never till she knew him had she swerved by one hair's breadth from the line of strictest duty; never had she known a thought which she need wish to hide from her husband. And then in an evil hour he had become almost domesticated in her house, and his influence had gradually infolded her like a cloud spread by a magician, and she had awakened to a new being. She had learned the meaning of that mystic word love.

From that night Bothwell was her slave. Touched, flattered, possessed by this fatal love—too glad weakly to echo the woman's favorite excuse, Fatality—he struggled no longer against the magic passion. He belonged henceforth to Lady Valeria—more completely enslaved than if she had been free to claim him before the world as her affianced husband. Her lightest word, her lightest look ruled him. He went where she told him, spent his days as she ordered. He had been one of the hardest-working officers in India up to this time, and his branch of the service, the Engineers, was one which offered splendid chances of promotion.

General Harborough had promised to do all that his very considerable influence could do to push his young friend to the front; and it seemed to the men who knew him best that Bothwell Grahame's fortune was made.

"There are men whose heads are turned by the first stroke of luck, and who never do anything after," said a canny Scotch major, "but Grahame is thorough, and is not afraid of hard work. Take my word for it, he'll get on just as young Napier did."

But, with the ball at his feet, Bothwell Grahame suddenly dropped out of the game. He left off working altogether. He was the slave of a woman who preferred her own pleasure in his society to his chances of distinction, who said, "Why should you work? there will be enough for both of us by and by."

By and by meant when the good old general should be lying in his grave. He was an old man. It was not possible to ignore that fact, though he was erect as a dart, active, full of dignity and intellect—a man of men. He was nearing the scriptural limit of threescore and ten, and the inevitable end that comes to us all must come to him before many years.

Nothing was further from Bothwell's thoughts than the idea of being maintained by a wife; but he let Lady Valeria tempt him away from his books or his laboratory; suffered himself to become indifferent to his profession—to care for nothing but the life he led in her boudoir or her drawing-room.

And then there came new difficulties. Lady Valeria was at heart a gamester. The excitement of cards or betting had become a necessity to her in her Indian life. She played high. She had her book for every great English race. She awaited the telegrams that brought her the tidings of victory or defeat with feverish impatience. The natural result followed. She was often in money difficulties. Generous as her husband was, she feared to appeal to him on these occasions. She knew that of all types of womanhood he most hated a gambling woman She had her pin-money, which was ample for all ordinary requirements and extravagances of a woman of fashion. She dared not ask her husband for more money. But she was not afraid to call upon her slave, Bothwell Grahame; and Bothwell had to help her somehow—this wife of the future, who by and by was to provide for him.

He helped her first by nominally lending—actually giving her—every sixpence of his own patrimony, disposing, bit by bit, of that little estate in Perthshire of which his ancestors had been so proud. When he had beggared himself thus he began to borrow of the Jews—always for Lady Valeria—and finally found himself in such a mess financially that he had to leave the army.

General Harborough heard of his difficulties, and supposed they were all self-induced, but made the kindest excuses for the sinner. He offered to pay Bothwell's debts, and implored him not to throw up his career, with all its brilliant chances. The general was wounded to the quick when his offers were steadfastly refused.

"A gentleman knows how to accept a service as well as how to render one," he said. "You saved my life, and I have never felt burdened by the obligation."

Bothwell stood before him, grave, pale, silent, humiliated by his kindness.

"Forgive me, sir," he faltered at last. "Believe me I am not ungrateful. There was a time when I would rather have accepted a favor from you than from any other man living. But I am tired of the army. I feel that I shall never get on. I have sent a statement of my affairs to my cousin's husband, the banker, who has a genius for finance. He will settle with my creditors, and I shall begin the world again, my own man."

Bothwell sighed involuntarily after those last words. What freedom, or manhood, or independence could there ever be for him, bound as he was bound?

He left India soon after this interview with the general, who was going back to England in the following year. Lady Valeria deeply resented his conduct in leaving India while she was obliged to remain there. It was desertion, infidelity. He ought to have remained at any cost—at any loss of his own self-respect. She never could be brought to consider things fom his standpoint. If he had loved her, she argued, he would have stayed. Love never counted the cost of anything. They parted in anger, and Bothwell went home with a sore heart, yet with a sense of relief in the idea of recovered freedom.

Then came a period of comparative liberty for Bothwell. He received an occasional letter from Lady Valeria, full of upbraidings and regrets. He answered as best he might—kindly, affectionately

even—but he flattered himself that the fatal tie, the dishonorable engagement, was a folly of the past. He was all the more anxious to believe this, during that peaceful winter at Penmorval, on account of his growing esteem for another woman. Oh! what a different thing it was, that winter love of his! Those happy half hours amid the rimy hedgerows, with the shrill north-easter swirling across the dark brown of the plowed fields, the yellow light of sunset shining against a leaden sky. How curiously different was the girl's light, happy talk in the English lane—talk which all the world might have heard—from those impassioned whispers beside the fountain under the stars of Orient. At first it seemed to him that he was only soothed and cheered by his acquaintance with Hilda Heathcote. He affected to consider her a mere girl, hardly emerged from the nursery. He was surprised to find how rightly she thought upon the gravest subjects. Then all at once he awoke to the knowledge that he loved her; and while he was hesitating, doubting whether he were free to indulge this new and purer, sweeter, happier love, hardly daring to ask himself whether that old tie was or was not canceled, he received a letter from Valeria, with the Paris postmark.

"We have just arrived here from Brindisi," she wrote. "We shall stay in London for a few weeks, and then go on to the general's place near Plymouth, where you must come and see me every day, just as you used at Simla. Oh, Bothwell, I can hardly trust myself to write. I dare not tell you half the joy I feel in the idea of our meeting. If you cared for me you would come to London. It would be so easy to pretend business, and you would be warmly welcomed in Grosvenor Square. Your last letter seemed to me so cold and distant—as if you were beginning to forget, or as if you had not forgiven my anger at your desertion. Ah, Bothwell, you should have pitied me and sympathized with me in that cruel parting. You ought to have known that my anger was despair. But you thought only of your own dignity, your own self-respect—not of my sorrow. Men are so selfish."

Bothwell did not go to London. He excused himself upon various grounds, and remained quietly at Penmorval. But from that hour his manner to Hilda changed altogether. From an unavowed lover he became an ordinary acquaintance. He set a watch upon his tongue that it should say no words of pleasantness. He vowed that he would not again suffer himself to be enmeshed in Lady Valeria's net; but until he had calmly and deliberately broken with her, he could not be the lover of any other woman. He made up his mind that so soon as the general and his wife were settled at Fox Hill there should be a rupture—temperate, gentle, firm, and irrevocable.

Lady Valeria came to Fox Hill and summoned her slave. He went, and there was no rupture—only a renewal of the old bonds. The bird was in the fowler's net again. Bothwell was often at Fox Hill. He spent long afternoons there *tête-à-tête* with Lady Valeria. She was less careful than she had been in India.

"We are not surrounded with busybodies here," she said. "I feel that I can do as I like in my own house."

He went to London to borrow money for her when she was in

difficulties about that horrible book of hers; and Lady Valeria's normal state now was financial difficulty. Almost everybody knew that she was a gambler, except her husband. He was so thoroughly respected and beloved that no one had the heart to make him unhappy by breathing a word to his wife's discredit. He thought her faultless.

She had hardened in that false, wicked life of hers; but she was more fascinating than ever, Bothwell thought, albeit he was far less under her spell than he had been in the old days at Simla. The very fever of her mind intensified her charm. She seemed such an ethereal creature—all life, and light, and sparkle.

And now half-buried in his corner of the railway-carriage, Bothwell smoked the pipe of meditation. He looked back upon that fatal past, and cursed himself for the weak folly that had put such a chain round his neck. He looked back and recalled the old scenes, the old feelings, and he almost wondered if he could be the same man who had so felt and so acted.

He drove to Fox Hill as fast as a cab-horse would take him, alighted a little way from the chief gates, and dismissed his conveyance, meaning to walk back to Plymouth after his interview. Fox Hill was four miles from the station, but Bothwell could walk four miles in an hour with that free swinging stride of his. A four-mile walk and a pipe might just serve to quiet his nerves after the ordeal he had to undergo.

The general's Devonshire home was an Italian villa, built on the southern slope of an amphitheater of hills, and commanding the town, the dock-yards, the Hamoose, and the Hoe in all their extent. Distance lent enchantment to the view. Plymouth, seen from this sunny hill-side, looked as beautiful as Naples.

The villa had been planned by an architect of taste and culture, built regardless of expense. The house was not large when measured by the number of its rooms; but all the rooms were spacious, lightsome, and lofty. The decorations were of the simplest. The glory of the place was its conservatories, which were so arranged as to introduce flowers and tropical foliage into every part of the dwelling. A long marble colonnade, inclosed by plate-glass shutters in winter or bad weather, surrounded the house, and here bloomed and flourished all that is rarest and loveliest in modern horticulture. The central hall had a glass roof, and was more a conservatory than a hall. The corridors between drawing-room and dining-room, between boudoir and study, were in-door rose gardens. Flowers pervaded the house, and harmonized admirably with the elegant simplicity of the furniture, the draperies of delicate chintz and Indian muslin.

The villa had been created sixty years ago, in the days of the Georges, a period when Italian colonnades, Corinthian porticos, and Pompeian conservatories were the rage; but the house suited Lady Valeria just as a well-chosen frame suits a picture.

On this summer September morning Lady Valeria was seated in the colonnade, half reclining in one of those very low chairs which she always affected, being one of those few women who can rise gracefully from a seat about a foot from the ground. She was half hidden by the foliage of oleanders and magnolia, and it was only by

a glimmer of white amongst the glossy green that Bothwell descried her in the distance as he crossed the lawn. There was a fountain on the lawn here, just as at Simla, but the fountain was a late improvement, insisted upon by Lady Valeria.

"It will recall Simla, where we were so happy," she told her husband.

"And yet you were so impatient to leave India, toward the last," he said, almost reproachfully.

"Yes, I was very tired of India at the last. There is an end of all things."

Bothwell had obeyed Lady Valeria's instructions to the letter. He had entered the grounds by a side gate, so as to escape challenge at the lodge; and now he made his way boldly to her boudoir. It was not a particularly sacred apartment, as it formed one in the suite of rooms and conservatories which communicated along the whole length of the house. Italian villas of the Georgian era are not planned for seclusion.

She was sitting in her low chair, with a little table at her side, scattered with books and newspapers. The books were mostly new French memoirs and novels of the most advanced school. The papers were chiefly sporting. She looked up languidly as Bothwell approached, and gave him her hand, like an empress, without stirring from her graceful repose amidst embroidered silken cushions. She was not beautiful. Her charm lay in an extreme refinement of feature and figure, a delicacy of tint which verged upon sickliness. It was the refinement of a vanishing race, and recalled the delicacy of an overtrained race-horse.

Her complexion was almost colorless in repose, but the lips were of the tint of pale pink rose petals, and every emotion flushed the waxen cheek with loveliest bloom. Her nose was long and thin, too long for perfect beauty. Her chin was a thought too sharp, her brow too narrow. But her eyes were exquisite. Herein lay her one grand charm, and Lady Valeria well knew the power of those large violet eyes, fringed with darkest lashes, accentuated by penciled brows—eyes which seemed to fill with tears at will—eyes which could plead more eloquently than lips ever spoke since the days of Eve, first tempted and then tempter.

"I hope you are not really ill," said Bothwell, seating himself in the chair opposite Lady Valeria.

"Only worried to death," she answered with an irritated air. "I have troubles enough to send me into an early grave."

"Money troubles?"

"Money troubles. Yes. I have other troubles too, but the money troubles are the most urgent. They gnaw the sharpest."

"You have been losing again?"

"Yes. I was so lucky with the Chester that I grew bold—determined upon a great *coup* at York, put every farthing I could scrape together upon the favorite for the Great Ebor. I had been assured that it was the safest thing in the world. I might back him with my wedding-ring, Sir George Mildmay said. And York has generally been lucky to me, you know. It is my own county, and I love every inch of it. The Knavesmire was the first race-course I ever saw, the place where I first learned to love horses and to understand

them. My father used to tell me everything about the races. I was the only one of us who was really interested in his talk."

"I thought the money from Davis, and the money you won on the Chester Cup, cleared all your difficulties."

"Yes, for the moment. But this York business has made things worse than they were before. Mildmay has offered to lend me the money."

She said this slowly, with drooping eyelids and a thoughtful air, but she stole a little look at Bothwell from beneath the long dark lashes, to see how he took her speech.

"You must not take a sixpence of his money—not a sixpence," said Bothwell, sternly.

"No, that is exactly my idea. It would be very bad form for a woman in my position to borrow from Mildmay—who is—well—a man of the world. But I must have the money somehow. The book-makers won't wait. They only give credit in my case because they know I dare not cheat them."

"Surely the book-men do not know that you are their creditor?"

"They are not supposed to know. The bets are made in my brother's name—Otho's—who has been in Australia for the last two years. But I don't believe those men would trust Otho, even if he were in London."

"It is dreadful," exclaimed Bothwell, deeply distressed. "You ought not to have entangled yourself again. What makes you do this thing, Valeria? It is worse than chloral, or any other form of feminine madness."

"Yes, it is a kind of madness, I suppose. I should not do it if I were happy. I shall have no need to do it when I am happy—by and by."

Again she stole a look at him, a tender, pathetic look, which would have melted him a year ago. But it left him unmoved now. He felt only anger at her folly, her obstinate persistence in wrong-doing.

"You must not take Mildmay's money," he repeated, "not for worlds. To think that you should have secret dealings with such a man—a hardened scamp and *roué*."

"I am not going to accept Sir George's offer, which was at least good-natured; so you need not be uncivil about him," replied Valeria, coolly, "but I must get the money somehow. I don't want Otho's name to be posted at Tattersall's. There are too many people who would guess that Otho stands for Valeria in this case."

"It would be disgraceful, horrible."

"But it will happen, I'm afraid, unless I can get the money."

"I can find no more, Valeria. That last loan from Davis was most difficult to manage. I had positively no security to offer. The money was advanced on the strength of Wyllard's position, on the speculation that he would not see me broke."

"I am not asking you to pay my debts," she replied, with her grand air. The air of a woman accustomed to be worshiped for all she did, and to do wrong with impunity. "But the money must be found somehow, and perhaps you can tell me where I am to get it?"

"From your husband," he answered, impetuously. "Yes,

Valeria, from your one true and loyal friend. The one man you can ask in all honor to pay for your follies."

"You ask me to go to him!" exclaimed Valeria, livid with anger. "You?"

"Yes, I. I, who have wronged him deeply by a most fatal engagement which I have regretted ever since it was made. Not because you are not lovely, fascinating, all that is fairest and most desirable in womankind; but because I have been hateful to myself on account of that treachery. What! to be the affianced lover of a woman whose husband's hand I grasped in seeming friendship: to smile in his face, to accept his kindness, his friendship, his confidence, while all my life was one long waiting for his death, while you and I were saying to each other every day, by and by we will do this, by and by we will go here and there, sail our yacht in the Mediterranean, build our cottage on the Scotch moors, by and by, when that good man who trusted us both is in his grave! Oh, it has been a hateful position, Valeria—base, miserable, guilty, accursed, for both of us, and it must end at last!"

There had been tears in his voice almost from the beginning of his speech, and at the end he broke down altogether and sobbed aloud.

Valeria rose out of her low chair, and stood before him straight as a dart. The movement was so quick, so instinct with an unholy grace, that it recalled the image of a cobra he had once seen rise up straight before him in the midst of his path through the jungle.

"You are in love with another woman," she hissed, like the serpent. "*That* is the meaning of this sudden outbreak of virtue."

He could not deny it.

"You want to break with me, in order that you may marry some one else," she said, whiter than death, her eyes dilating, her lips quivering.

"Yes," he answered, quietly. "I could form a happier tie if you set me free. But there is not one word which I said just now about the feeling of my own baseness which was not just as true two years ago as it is to-day. Such a bond as ours never could bring happiness, Valeria, to man or to woman."

"It gave us hope," she said; "a fair dream of the future. Well, it is all over. Whatever it is worth it is gone—like a tuft of thistledown blown into the air. Go, Bothwell Grahame, you are your own man again; go and marry your new love."

"It will not be a marriage of to-day, or to-morrow," answered Bothwell, gravely. "My new love and I will have to wait for better times. First, I am a pauper; and, secondly, there is a taint upon my name, inasmuch as the good people of Bodmin and the neighborhood have taken it into their wise heads that I am a murderer, because I refused to answer some very impertinent questions at the inquest. Valeria, will you forgive me—will you believe—"

"That you were heartily tired of me ages ago, before you left India," she said, interrupting him with a feverish excitement. She had sunk into her low chair again, and was seated with her hands clasped upon the basket-work bedizened with trappings of Oriental embroidery, like an Arab's horse—her eyes gazing over the wide pan-

orama of land and sea, the dock-yards, the river, the light-house yonder, and the long line of surf dashing against the breakwater.

"Yes, I know that you were weary of me long before that bitter good-by," she went on, breathless with passion, her sentences broken into short gasps. "I think I knew even then that you were false—though I pretended to myself that you were true. I don't believe you ever loved me. You just let me love you, that was all. If you had really cared for me—as other men have cared for other women—you would not have been so obedient. You would have flung prudence to the winds—you would have made scenes—you would have wanted to run away with me. No, you never loved me."

It would have been vain now for Bothwell to protest the reality of the old worn-out passion. It had never been of the strongest stuff that love is made of, and it had long been growing threadbare. He had received his release, and that was the boon he had come here to ask. But he could not leave the woman he had once loved without one word of peace.

"Valeria," he said, gently, tenderly even, "I shall stay here till you forgive me."

"Would you stay until you have forced me to tell a lie? There can be no blacker lie than any word of mine that offered forgiveness to you. You have deceived me cruelly. You were my strong rock, and I leaned upon you for comfort. Oh, Bothwell, what is she like, this other woman for whom you forsake me? Is she so much more beautiful—so much younger—fresher than I?"

"She is good, and pure, and true, and has been brave and loyal when the world spoke evil of me! That is all I can tell you about her."

"But she is handsome, I suppose? You are not going to marry a plain woman, out of gratitude!"

"She is lovely, in my eyes, and I believe she is generally considered a pretty girl."

"Who is she?"

"A lady. I can tell you no more yet awhile. Hark! there is the general's voice. I had better go. Stay, there is something you once gave me. You told me to wear it till—"

"Till you were tired of me. Yes, I remember," she said, impatiently.

"Till the tie was broken between us, in some wise," he answered, taking out his watch.

There was about three inches of slender Trichinopoly chain on the swivel of the watch, and on the chain hung an old-fashioned hoop-ring of old Brazilian diamonds. The ring had belonged to Lady Valeria's grandmother, and had been Valeria's favorite jewel.

She snatched it from Bothwell's hand the moment he had taken it off the chain, and flung it with all her force into the nearest thicket of shrubs.

"So much for the token of a worn-out love!" she said "If one of the gardeners finds it he will pawn it at Devonport, and spend the money in drink. A worthy end for such a souvenir. Good-by, Mr. Grahame."

Bothwell bowed and left her; left her to crawl up to her bed-

room like a wounded doe, and fling herself face downward on the floor, and lie there tearless, despairing, ready to invoke hell itself to help her to some kind of revenge, had she but believed in the devil. But Lady Valeria was an Agnostic. She had not even *that* comfort left her. .

CHAPTER XI.

A FATAL LOVE.

M. DRUBARDE and his visitor descended the ladder, and entered the police-officer's apartment, which consisted of two small rooms, the outer an office and saloon combined, the inner a bed-chamber, which Mr. Heathcote saw through the open door: a neat little bachelor's nest, with a velvet-curtained bedstead, and walls lined with portraits of every kind, engravings, lithographs, photographs.

The saloon was decorated with the same style of art, diversified by engravings from newspapers, all representing notorious crimes: "The Murder in the Rue de la Paix;" "Germinie Latouche, stabbed in the kitchen of the Red Cross Restaurant by her lover, Gilles Perdie;" "The arrest of Victor Larennes for the great forgeries on the Bank of France;" "The escape of Jean Bizat, the parricide." Art had represented all these scenes with due dramatic fervor. They were hardly pleasing subjects in the abstract, but to André Drubarde they were all delightful, for they recalled some of the most interesting and most profitable hours of his life. He was gratified to see his guest looking at those stories of crime, in artistic shorthand.

"Gilles Perdie would have got off, if it had not been for me," he said, with excusable pride. "The police had been hunting for him ten long days, when I put them on the right scent. We knew that he had not got far from the scene of the crime—for there had been no time for escape, you see. The murder was found out within half an hour of the woman's death. He was hunted for in every hole and corner within a radius of a mile. No one had seen him leave the premises. No one had set eyes on him since the murder, which occurred in the early morning in October, when it was not light before six. 'How do you know that he ever did leave that house?' I asked one day, meaning the Red Cross, a workman's eating-house in the Rue Galande. He was cellarman there, cellarman and *terreur* combined. My comrades laughed at me. They had searched the Red Cross from cellar to garret; they had not left an inch of the building unexplored. 'Have you looked in the empty casks?' I asked. Yes, they had looked in the empty casks. The cellar was very neatly arranged, the empty casks in a row on one side, the full ones on the other. My friends protested that they were not such fools as to have overlooked an empty cask. 'Who knows,' I said. 'We will go there this afternoon and overhaul those barrels.' Need I tell you the result? It is history. There was one empty hogshead, artfully pushed in a corner, last in the rank of unbroached hogsheads. The open end had been turned toward the wall, and in that empty Macon cask, in that rat-haunted cellar, Gilles Perdie had contrived to exist for ten days, by the aid of a

little girl, his victim's daughter, who lived in the house, and whom he threatened to kill as he had killed her mother if she told any one about him, or failed to carry him food and drink twice a day. There, amidst vermin and ordure, he had lived, coiled up in his hogshead, and perhaps not much worse off than some of the poor of Paris, who have committed no crime except poverty."

"You have a right to boast of your scent, monsieur, after such a triumph as that."

"A bagatelle, monsieur—one of the poorest of my cases; but it made a great hit at the time. My portrait appeared in three different newspapers, side by side with that of the criminal."

"A distinguished honor. And now if you will be kind enough to give me the further information which you promised as to names and details?"

"Monsieur Effcotte, you are Mr. Distin's friend, and for you I will do what I would hardly do for my own brother. I will trust you with one of my books."

"You are extremely obliging."

"I know, sir, that there are some people who think nothing of lending a book; they can hand over a treasured volume to a friend—to an indifferent acquaintance even—without a pang; they can see him turn the leaves and violate the stiffness of the back. I, monsieur, would almost as soon lend my arm and hand as one of those volumes; but for you I will make an exception. You shall have the volume which contains the report of the Prévol case to read and copy at your leisure."

"You are more than good."

M. Drubarde's library consisted of four rows of handsomely-bound volumes, whose gilded backs shone behind a barricade of plate-glass, in a locked book-case. They were books which he had collected at his leisure, and which bore for the most part on his profession. The memoirs of Vidocq, the memoirs of Canler, of Sanson the executioner, and other biographies of equally thrilling interest. For literature of so lofty a stamp, André Drubarde had deemed no binding too luxurious, and he had clothed his favorites in all the glory of purple, and green, and crimson, and sumptuous gilding. He had decorated their backs with all the bookbinder's chosen ornamentations—his *fleurs-de-lis* and roses, his foliage and acorns, and scrolls and emblems. Even the volume of printed reports which M. Drubarde handed to Mr. Heathcote was gorgeous in red morocco and gold.

"You will find the case fully reported in that volume," he said. "When you have read it, and made your own conclusions upon it, you can come back to me, and we will talk the matter over together."

"I will call upon you again to-morrow at the same hour, if you will allow me," replied Heathcote, laying a ten-pound note upon the table; "but I must ask you, in the meantime, to accept this trifle as an earnest of future remuneration. I do not on any account desire to impose on your good nature."

M. Drubarde shrugged his shoulders; declared that, as a matter of feeling, he would rather work gratuitously for any friend of Mr. Distin's; but that, from a business point of view, his time was

valuable. He had a little place in the country, fifteen miles out of Paris; he had nephews and nieces dependent upon him; in a word, he had to work for others as well as for himself.

"Before you go, perhaps you will be so good as to tell me your motive for hunting up the history of this old murder?" he said, with a keen look. He had been intending to ask this question from the beginning.

"I am hunting out the details of an old murder in order to fathom the mystery of a new murder, or of a strange death, which I take to be a murder. Can you read English, Monsieur Drubarde?"

"I have a niece who can—a girl who was educated at Jersey. I am going to my country home this afternoon, and my niece can read anything you give me."

Mr. Heathcote took from his pocket-book the report of the two inquests, cut out of the local papers and pasted on slips of foolscap.

"If your niece will translate that report for you, I think you will understand the motive of my investigation," he said, and then bade M. Drubarde good-morning.

He went down-stairs with the volume of reports under his arm, hailed a fly, and drove to the Hotel de Bade, stopping only to engage a stall for that evening at the Comédie Française, the only recreation which he cared for in his present frame of mind. He had numerous acquaintances in Paris, but he did not care about seeing one of them just now, nor did he linger in the bright gay streets to mark the changes which a year had made in the aspect of that ever-varying city, as he would have done had his mind been free from care.

He had a sitting-room and bedroom on the second floor of the hotel, two nice little rooms opening into each other, and both overlooking the Boulevard, an outlook which, on former occasions, he had preferred to the monastic quiet of the court-yard, where there were no sounds but the splashing of the water, with which the man-of-all-work sluiced the stone pavement at intervals of an hour or two all through the broiling afternoon, or the scream of a chambermaid arguing with a waiter, both talking as loud as if they had been communicating from the gate of St. Martin to the gate of St. Denis. To-day, with the report of the Prévol case open before him, Edward Heathcote could have found it in his heart to curse the Boulevard, with its incessant roar and rattle, its incessant ya-youp of coachmen on the point of running over a foot-passenger, and everlasting clamor of the lively Gaul. He would like to have been in a hermit's cave, with never a sound but the singing of the wind on the mountain-side.

Yes, here was the interrogation of the waiter at the Henri Quatre Hotel:

"Do you remember a lady and gentleman who dined in the private room on the 6th of September?"

The waiter remembered perfectly. The lady was very pretty; the gentleman remarkably handsome, and with a distinguished air. They had a little girl with them. The gentleman ordered a private room, and a little dinner *bien soigné*. He was very particular about the champagne, and about the dessert. The grapes and peaches were to be of the choicest. The gentleman and lady dined early—between

five and six—and the lady had a somewhat agitated air—seemed out of sorts, and ate very little. The gentleman was very attentive to her, and petted the little girl. At half-past six they went for a drive in the forest. The carriage was ordered directly they sat down to dinner.

"Had you any reason to suppose that this lady and gentleman had been followed or watched by any one when they arrived at the Henri Quatre?"

"They arrived in a fly. No, I observed no one lurking about or watching when they arrived. I went out to give an order to the coachman while the carriage was standing before the door, waiting to take them for their ride in the forest; and I observed a man on the other side of the road. I should not have noticed him, perhaps, if the collar of his overcoat had not been turned up in a curious manner. I thought it strange that any one should wear an overcoat on such an evening."

"Did this man appear to be watching the hotel?"

"He was standing in front of the hotel when I went out. I saw him look across at the window in which the lady and gentleman were dining. The window was open, and there were two candelabra upon the table. Any one could see the diners from the road."

"There was no blind, or curtain?"

"No. The evening was particularly mild. All the windows in the sitting-rooms were open."

"What became of this man?"

"He walked rapidly along the road, and turned the corner on to the terrace."

"Should you recognize him if you were to see him again?"

"Impossible. It was twilight when I saw him, and he was on the other side of the road. His coat collar was turned up, so as to conceal the lower half of his face."

"But you must at least have observed his general appearance. Was he tall or short? Had he the air of a gentleman?"

"He was tall. Yes, I should say he was a gentleman."

"Young or old?"

"He walked like a young man. I thought he had an agitated air. He walked very quickly, but stopped suddenly two or three times between the hotel and the corner of the terrace, as if he were thinking deeply; hesitating whether to go this way or that; and then he walked on again more quickly than before."

"You saw no more of him that evening?"

"No. At half-past eight o'clock I heard that there had been a double murder in the forest, and that the bodies were lying at the Town Hall. I went to see the bodies, and recognized the lady and gentleman who had dined at our hotel. I also saw the little girl who was in the charge of the police. She was crying bitterly. The corpses were removed to Paris immediately after the inquest."

The examination of the driver came next. He had very little to telll. He had been told to wait at the cross-roads until the lady and gentleman returned from their stroll. It was a lovely night—a night which might have tempted any one to alight and walk in the forest glade. The moon was rising, but it was dark amid the old trees. The man had been waiting about a quarter of an hour when he

heard a shot a little way off—and then another, and another, and another, in rapid succession—and then he heard a child screaming. He tied his horse to a tree, and he ran into the glade, guided by the screams of the child. He found the lady and gentleman lying on the ground side by side, the child kneeling by the lady, and screaming with grief and terror. The gentleman groaned two or three times, and then expired. The lady neither stirred nor moaned. Her light-colored gown and mantle were covered with blood.

The driver was questioned as to whether anybody had passed him while he waited at the cross-roads. No, he had not observed any one, except an old woman and a boy who had been gathering sticks in the forest. The place at which he was waiting was a well-known point. The glade in which the murder occurred was considered one of the most picturesque spots in the forest. He always drove there with people who wanted to see the beauties of St. Germain. But at that late hour there were very few people driving. He had met no carriage after leaving the terrace.

Then followed the examination of the child, and of Marie Prévol's mother. They were both lengthy, for the *Juge d' Instruction* had applied himself with peculiar earnestness to the task of unraveling this mystery, and it was only in the details of the dead woman's surroundings that the clew to the secret could be found.

The child had evidently answered the magisterial questions with extreme intelligence. However she might have broken down afterward, she had been perfectly rational at the time of the interrogatory. It seemed to Mr. Heathcote, influenced perhaps by his knowledge of after events, that the child's replies indicated a hypersensitiveness and an intellect intensified by feverish excitement.

"You remember going to St. Germain with your aunt?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all you can recall about that day. Tell me exactly when and how you started, and what happened to you on the way. I want to hear everything."

"It was three o'clock when we left my aunt's house. Monsieur de Maucroix came in a little before that, and asked my aunt to go to dinner with him somewhere in the country. The weather was too lovely for Paris, he said. She did not want to go. She said Georges would be angry."

"Who is Georges?"

"Some one I never saw."

"Was he a friend of your aunt's?"

"Yes, I think so. She often talked of him. Monsieur de Maucroix used to talk of him, and to be angry about him."

"Why angry?"

"I don't know. He used to say Georges will not let you do this. Georges will not let you do that. What right has Georges that he should order you here or there? And then my aunt used to cry."

"Were you often at your aunt's apartment?"

"Very often."

"You lived there sometimes, did you not?"

"Yes, I used to stay there for a week sometimes. It was very nice to be with my aunt; much nicer than being with grandmother. She used to take me out in a carriage sometimes. Her rooms were

prettier than grandmother's rooms, for there were flowers all about, and pretty things, and she was prettier, and wore prettier clothes."

"But if you were there for a week at a time, how was it that you never saw this Monsieur Georges, who was such a close friend of your aunt's?"

"He never came till late at night. He used to come to supper often. I heard the servant say so. She said he was a dissipated man, a bad subject. Grandmother said so too. 'Has that night-bird been here again?' she asked my aunt once, and my aunt was angry and began to cry, and then my grandmother got angry, too, and said, 'Who is he, and what is he? I want to know that.' And then my aunt said, 'He is a gentleman, that is enough for you to know.' And then she showed my grandmother a pretty necklace that Georges had given her the night before, a necklace of shining white beads like the water-drops from the fountain at the Tuileries."

"They were diamonds, I suppose?'

"Yes, that is what my grandmother called them. She wetted them with her tongue to find out if they were real diamonds, and then she and my aunt kissed each other, and made friends."

"You are sure you never saw this Monsieur Georges?"

"Never. My aunt used to send me to bed very early, before she went to the theater."

"Did she not take you with her to the theater sometimes?"

"Never. She said that theaters were not good for little girls."

"Now tell me about your journey to St. Germain. How did you go?"

"First in a carriage, and then in a train."

"Had you to wait at the station?"

"A long time. I was tired. I thought it would have been nicer to be at home."

"What did your aunt and Monsieur de Maucroix do while they were waiting?"

"They sat in a corner of a big room with great windows, through which we could see the trains. I watched the trains through the window."

"Were there many other people in the room?"

"Very few."

"Did you take notice of any one?"

"I noticed a little girl. She was bigger than I am, but still quite little. I thought I should like to play with her. She had a blue balloon, and she let it fly out of the window and broke it."

"Did you notice nobody else?"

"Only one other person, a gentleman who wore dark spectacles."

"What made you observe him in particular?"

"His spectacles were so curious, and he looked at my aunt."

"What do you mean when you say he looked at your aunt? Did he look as if he knew her?"

"I don't know. He stood just outside the doorway, looking at my aunt and Monsieur de Maucroix."

"How long did he stand there?"

"I don't know."

"For five minutes, do you think—as long as you could count a hundred?"

"Longer than that."

"Was he young or old, tall or short?"

"He was tall. I think he must have been old, because he wore spectacles."

"Did your aunt and Monsieur de Maucroix observe him?"

"No. I asked my aunt when we were in the train if she had seen the gentleman with the funny spectacles, and she said no."

"Did you see him again after he left the waiting-room?"

"No."

"Now, tell me all you can about your journey to St. Germain."

"We went in the train, in a beautiful carriage with soft cushions. I looked out of the window all the time. My aunt and Monsieur de Maucroix sat by the other window talking."

"Did you hear what they said?"

"Not much. I was not listening. It was so nice to see the country, and the trees rushing by. I heard Monsieur de Maucroix ask my aunt to go away with him—he begged her to go—to Italy, I think he said. Is there a place called Italy?"

"Yes. And how did your aunt answer?"

"She said she could not go. She was bound to Georges. Georges would kill her if she left him. Monsieur de Maucroix laughed, and said that people do not do such things nowadays. He laughed, and soon afterward my aunt and he were both dead. I saw the blood—streams of blood."

At this point, said the report, the girl Lemarque became hysterical, and the rest of her evidence had to be postponed for another day. In the meantime the grandmother and Barbe Girot, Marie Prévôl's servant, were interrogated.

Mme. Lemarque stated that her daughter was an actress at the Porte St. Martin. She was very beautiful, and was more renowned for her grace and beauty than for her acting. She danced and sung and acted in fairy scenes. She was only three-and-twenty years of age at the time of her death.

Upon being asked by the judge whether her daughter led a strictly moral life, Mme. Lemarque replied that her conduct was purity itself as compared with that of many ladies who acted in fairy pieces.

"But there was some one, perhaps," insinuated the judge.

"There is always some one. So beautiful a woman must have had many admirers. I have her photograph here. It is an exquisite face, a beauty quite out of the common—refined, spiritual. Surely among her many admirers there must have been one whom she favored above all the rest?"

"Yes, there was one, and it was that one who murdered my daughter and Monsieur de Maucroix. No one can doubt it."

"But you have no actual knowledge of the fact? You speak upon conjecture?"

"Who else should murder her? Whom did she ever injure, poor child? She was amiability itself—the kindest of comrades, charitable, good."

"What do you know of this person whom you suspect?"

"Nothing except that which I heard from my daughter."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Never. If he had been the emperor he could not have been more mysterious in his goings to and fro. I was never allowed to see him."

"Was he often at your daughter's apartment?"

"Very often. He used to go there after the theater. He was devoted to her. There were some who believed that he was her husband, that he loved her too passionately to deny her anything she might ask. When she was not acting he took her abroad—to Italy—to Spain. If it were only for a holiday for a fortnight he would carry her off to some remote village in Switzerland or the Pyrenees. I used to tell her that he was ashamed of his love for her, or he would not have hidden her in those lonely places. He would have taken her to Dieppe or Arcachon, where they would have met their friends."

"Did you ever find out who this person is?"

"Never."

"But you must know something about him and his circumstances. Was he a nobleman, or did he belong to the mercantile class?"

"I know nothing, except that he was rich. He showered gifts upon my daughter. He would have taken her off the stage if she would have allowed him. He would have given her a house and gardens at Bougival instead of her little apartment on a third floor in the Rue Lafitte, but she loved the theater, and she had a proud spirit, poor child; she had not the temper of *la femme entretenue.*"

"What was the name of this person?"

"Monsieur Georges. I never heard of him by any other name."

"Did your daughter reciprocate this passion?"

"For a long time she seemed to do so. They were like lovers in a story. That lasted for years—from the time of her first appearance at the Porte St. Martin, which was four years before her death. And then there came a change. Monsieur de Maucroix fell in love with her, followed her about everywhere, worshiped her. And he was young and handsome and fascinating, with the style and manners of a prince. He had spent all his life in palaces: had been attached to the emperor's household from his boyhood; had fought bravely through the war."

"Had you reason to know that Monsieur Georges was jealous of Monsieur de Maucroix?"

"Yes, my daughter told me that there had been scenes."

"Had the two men met?"

"I think not."

"How long had Monsieur de Maucroix been an avowed admirer of your daughter?"

"Only a few months—since Easter, I think. My granddaughter used to see him when she was staying with her aunt."

"Could you reconcile it to your conscience to allow your grandchild to live in the house of an aunt who was leading—well—we will say a doubtful life?"

"There was no harm in my daughter's life that I knew of. Monsieur Georges may have been my daughter's husband. There is no reason that he should not have been. At her lodgings she was

known as Madame Georges. It was under that name she traveled when she went abroad."

"But you had never heard of any marriage—at the Mairie or elsewhere? And, again, your daughter could not be married without your consent."

"I do not say that she had been married in France. She may have been married abroad—in England, perhaps. He took her to England soon after they became acquainted. And in England there are no obstacles to marriage; there is no one's consent to be asked."

"We will admit that a marriage in a foreign country would have been possible. But this Monsieur de Maucroix, this second admirer—"

"Was only an admirer. My daughter's life was not a disreputable life. I have nothing to reproach myself with upon that score."

"Can you help us find this man Georges, whom you suspect as the murderer? Do you know where he is to be found?"

"If I did the police would have known before now. I tell you I know nothing about him—absolutely nothing. I have seen and heard nothing of him since the murder. He has not been to my daughter's apartment since her death—he was not at her funeral. He who pretended to adore her did not follow her to the grave. All Paris was there; but he who was supposed to be her husband was not there."

"How can you tell that he was not there, since you do not know his appearance?"

"Barbe Girot knows him. It is on her authority that I say he was not there."

"That will be sufficient for to-day. I will take Barbe Girot's evidence next."

Barbe Girot's evidence was to the effect that for nearly four years this M. Georges had been a frequent visitor at her mistress's apartment. He had come there after the theater, and it had been Barbe's duty to leave the supper-table laid, and the candles ready on the chimney-piece and table, before she went to bed. Mme. Georges let herself in with a latch-key, and Barbe rarely sat up for her. Madame did not always return to the Rue Lafitte for supper. There were occasions when she supped on the Boulevard, in the Bois, goodness knows where. Barbe saw M. Georges occasionally, but not frequently. He was a handsome man, but not in his first youth. He might have been three or four-and-thirty. He was generous, and appeared to be rich. Whatever his fortune may have been, he would have given madame the whole of it if she had asked him. There was never a man more passionately in love with a woman. After M. de Maucroix's appearance on the scene, there were storms. Barbe had seen M. Georges cry like a child. She had also seen him give way to violent passion. There had been one night when she thought that he would kill madame. He had his hands upon her throat; he seemed as if he were going to strangle her; and then he fell on his knees and groveled at her feet. He implored her to forgive him. It was dreadful.

Did Barbe Girot think that M. Georges was madame's husband?

She had never presumed to form an opinion upon that subject. Her mistress wore a wedding-ring, and was always known as Mme.

Georges in the house where she lived. Madame's conduct was altogether irreproachable. Until M. de Maucroix began to visit her, no other man than M. Georges had crossed her threshold. And the visits of M. de Maucroix were such visits as any gentleman in Paris might pay to any lady, were she the highest in the land.

"Did your mistress ever go out with Monsieur de Maucroix before that fatal visit to St. Germain?"

"Never. And on that occasion madame took the little girl with her. She refused to go alone with Monsieur de Maucroix."

"Is it your opinion that your mistress was inclined to favor Monsieur de Maucroix's suit?"

"Alas! yes. He was so young, so fascinating, so handsome, and he adored her. If she had not been in love with him, she would hardly have permitted his visits, for they were the cause of such agony of mind to Monsieur Georges."

"It is your belief then that she had transferred her affection from the older to the younger lover?"

"I fear so."

"You have not seen Monsieur Georges since the murder?"

"No."

"Are you sure that he was not at the funeral?"

"Quite sure."

"But there was a great crowd at the cemetery. How can you be sure that he was not in the crowd?"

"I can not be sure of that, but I am sure that he paid my mistress no honor. He was not among those who stood around her grave, or who threw flowers upon her coffin. I stayed by the grave after all was over and the crowd had dispersed, but Monsieur Georges never came near to cast a look upon the spot where my poor mistress was lying. He has not been at her apartment since her death—he never came to look upon her corpse when it was lying there."

"And he has not written—he has given no orders as to the disposal of your mistress's property?"

"No. Madame Lemarque has taken possession of everything. She is living in my mistress's apartment until the furniture can be sold."

"Do you know of any photograph or portrait of Monsieur Georges among your late mistress's possessions?"

"I never saw any such portrait."

"You would know Monsieur Georges wherever you might happen to see him?"

"Yes. I do not think I could fail to recognize him."

"Even if he had disguised himself?"

"Even then. I think I should know his voice anywhere, even if I could not see his face."

"Will you describe him?"

"He is a tall man, broad-shouldered, powerful-looking. He has fine features, blue eyes, light brown hair, thick and flowing, and worn much longer than most people wear their hair. He is not so handsome or so elegant as Monsieur de Maucroix, but he has a more commanding look."

"That description would apply to hundreds of men. Can you mention any peculiarity of feature, expression, gait, manner?"

"No, I can recall nothing peculiar."

"And in moments of confidence did your mistress never tell you anything about this Monsieur Georges, his profession, his belongings, his place of residence?"

"Nothing."

"He did not live at your mistress's apartment, I conclude?"

"No, he did not live there."

"Did you never hear how he was occupied during the day—since you say he was never at your mistress's apartment in the day-time?"

"Never. I was told nothing about him except that he was rich and a gentleman. I asked no questions. My place was comfortable, my wages were paid regularly, and madame was kind to me."

"Where did Leonie Lemarque sleep when she stayed in the Rue Lafitte?"

"She occupied a little bed in my room, which is inside the kitchen."

"Were you long in madame's service?"

"Nearly four years. From the beginning of her engagement at the Porte St. Martin, when she took the apartment in the Rue Lafitte. Her salary at the theater justified her in taking such an apartment. Before that time she had been living with her mother on the other side of the Seine."

"It is your opinion that Monsieur Georges was the murderer?"

"That is my fixed opinion."

This concluded the examination of Barbe Girot.

The little girl's examination was not resumed until ten days later. She had been very ill in the meantime, and seemed altogether weak and broken down when she was brought before the *Juge d'Instruction*. She burst out crying in the midst of her evidence, and the grandmother had great difficulty in calming her.

"We had a very nice dinner, and Monsieur de Maucroix was so kind, and gave me grapes, and a big peach, and he promised to buy me a doll next day in the Passage Jouffroy. My aunt was sad, and Monsieur de Maucroix begged her to be gay, and he talked about taking her to Italy with him, just as he had talked in the train. And then we went out in a carriage and drove along a terrace, where there was a beautiful view over a river, hills, and valleys. My aunt seemed much gayer, and she and Monsieur de Maucroix were talking and laughing all the time, and afterward, when we all got out of the carriage and walked in the forest, they both seemed very happy, and my aunt rested her head on Monsieur de Maucroix's shoulder as they walked along, and said it was like being in heaven to be in that lovely moonlit forest with him; and then, just at that moment, a man rushed out from the darkness under the trees, like a wild beast out of a cave, and shot, and shot, and shot again, and again and again. And first Monsieur de Maucroix fell, and then my aunt, and she was all over blood. I could see it streaming over her white gown, first one stream and then another. I can see it now. I am seeing it always. It wakes me out of my sleep. Oh, take it away—take away the dark forest—take away the blood!"

At this point, said the report, the child again became hysterical,

and had to be carried away. After this she became dangerously ill with brain fever, and could not again be interrogated formally.

CHAPTER XII.

LEONIE S MISSION.

THE report of the interrogatory before the *Juge d'Instruction* was followed by a page of notes written by the police-officer Drubarde.

The child Leonie Lemarque was not again in a condition to give her evidence. A violent attack of brain fever succeeded her second appearance before the *Juge d'Instruction,* and on her recovery from the fever it was found that her mind had suffered seriously from the shock she had undergone. Memory was a blank. The *Juge d'Instruction* visited her in her own home when she was convalescent, and tried to recall the impressions made upon her at the time of the murder, in the hope of identifying the murderer; but she had forgotten the whole circumstances of her aunt's death, yet suffered agonies from a vague terror associated in her enfeebled mind with the very name of that aunt.

As soon as she was well enough to travel she was taken to the convent of Dinan by a good priest who had befriended her grandmother for many years. After this transference to the convent the police lost sight of the child Lemarque.

Throughout the evening, and in the wakeful intervals of a somewhat disturbed night, Edward Heathcote brooded over the details of the evidence which he had read—not once, but several times, before he closed the volume of reports.

The detective instinct, which is a characteristic of every well-trained lawyer's mind, had been suddenly developed into almost a passion. He no longer limited his desire to the unraveling of the web of Leonie Lemarque's fate; he ardently longed to discover the mystery of Marie Prévol's murder—to succeed where one of the most accomplished Parisian detectives had ignominiously failed. His eagerness to hear more about Drubarde's efforts and failures in this particular case led him to the Quai de Grands Augustins at an early hour, in time to surprise the worthy André in the act of breakfasting temperately upon *café au lait* and boiled eggs.

Monsieur Drubarde gave his new friend a cheery welcome. It was a lovely morning, balmy as midsummer, and the little garden on the leads was bright with gayly-colored asters, nasturtiums and geraniums, and agreeably perfumed with mignonette.

"Do you perceive the exquisite odors?" asked Drubarde.

"Your mignonette is delicious."

"My mignonette!" cried the police-officer, scornfully. "Why, when the wind blows straight from the flower-market, as it does to-day, I can sit in my garden and enjoy all the perfumes of the Riviera. I can revel in orange blossoms, drink my fill of tuberoses and stephanotis, Marechal Neil and Jacqueline roses. And look, what a view! Not a touch of the sculptor's chisel that I can not see yonder on the old kings of Notre Dame; not a cornice or a column in the new hospital that does not stand clear in the morning light!

And yet Paris is peopled with fools who do not make gardens on their house-tops."

"Perhaps every landlord would not be so complaisant as yours, Monsieur Drubarde, nor every housetop so adapted to horticulture."

"True, your Parisian landlord is a churl and a niggard and a good many of our house-tops are no doubt impracticable. But the inventive mind, the love of the beautiful, is more often wanting. I see you have been good enough to bring back my volume. You have read the report, I suppose?"

"Every line, every syllable, three times over."

"And you are interested?"

"Deeply. I was never more intensely interested in any case that has come within my knowledge, and as a lawyer I have become acquainted with many strange stories. Yes, I am more interested than I can say in the fate of that unhappy actress, in the character of her mysterious lover; and yet I doubt if this former crime has any bearing upon the murder of Leonie Lemarque."

"It would certainly be going somewhat far to suppose a link between the death of a girl traveling alone in Cornwall—a death which may, after all, have been accidental—and the murder of an actress ten years before in the forest of St. Germain. However, it is only by the minutest scrutiny of Leonie's past life that you can arrive at the motive which took her to England, and discover whether she had an enemy in that country—that is to say, if she was lured across the Channel in order to be made away with by that enemy. A very wild and far-fetched supposition I think you will admit, monsieur, and one which our talented friend, Mr. Distin, would not entertain for five minutes."

"Professional acumen like Mr. Distin's is apt to run in grooves—to be too intent upon following the practical and the possible to shut out the romantic element, to strangle the imagination, and to forget that it is very often by following the seemingly impossible that we arrive at the truth."

"I see you are an enthusiast, monsieur."

"I have never tried to subjugate my imagination. As a lawyer I found ideality the most useful faculty of the brain. Now, I have been thinking about Leonie Lemarque's fate from every possible point of view, from the standpoint of my modest imagination, as well as from the standpoint of common-sense, and it has occurred to me that if the murderer of Marie Prévol is living he would be Leonie's natural enemy."

"Why so?"

"Because she was the only witness of his crime. She alone would have the power to identify him as the murderer."

"You forget that it is just that power which the poor girl lost in consequence of the horror of that scene of which she was the solitary witness. The fever deprived her of memory."

"That effect of the fever may not have been permanent. The agitation which she showed at the mention of her aunt's name—when Sister Gudule questioned her about the silk handkerchief given to her by Marie Prévol—would indicate that memory was not a blank. And again, if she had forgotten the person of the murderer,

or even the fact of the murder, he would not know that, and would regard her existence as a source of danger to himself."

André Drubarde smiled the superior smile of experience reproving folly.

"And you think that after having allowed this one witness of his crime to exist unmolested for ten years, the assassin all at once took it into his head to murder her, that with this view he carried her to your barbarous country of Cornuailles, and there flung her over an embankment. I am tempted to paraphrase the Scripture, monsieur, and to exclaim, 'Are there not viaducts and embankments in this little France of ours, that a man should go to the remote west of England in order to commit murder in that particular fashion?'"

Mr. Heathcote felt that the police-officer had the best of the argument.

"I grant that it would have been a clumsy method of getting rid of the girl," he said, "but murder has been clumsily done before to-day, and imagination can conceive no crime so improbable as not to be paralleled by fact. However, it is perhaps too soon to speculate that the murderer of Marie Prévol was also the murderer of Leonie Lemarque. What we have to do is to find out the reason of the girl's journey to England. But before we set about that task I should like you to tell me what steps you took in your endeavor to trace the murderer, after the examination before the *Juge d'Instruction?*"

"I looked over the case in my note-book last night, as I was prepared for you to ask for those details," replied Drubarde. "It was a case that interested me profoundly, all the more so, perhaps, because I made so little headway in my investigations. My first endeavor was to trace the murderer's proceedings immediately after the crime. He must have made his escape from St. Germain somehow, unless he had killed himself in some obscure corner of the wood. Even then, the finding of the body would have been a question of so many days, weeks, or months. Alive, it would have been impossible for him to remain in hiding in the forest for a week; as the wood was searched thoroughly during the three days immediately succeeding the murder. On the third day, a hat was found in a boggy bit of ground, ever so far from the scene of the murder. The hat was a gentleman's hat, but it had been lying there three days and three nights in a bog. It had been rained upon for two days out of the three—there was no maker's name—no indication by which the owner of the hat could be traced. That it had been found so far off seemed to me to prove that the murderer had been roaming the wood in a wild and disordered frame of mind, and walking at a tremendous pace, or he could never have got over the distance between the time when he was seen by the waiter at the Henri Quatre, to turn the corner of the terrace, and the period of the murder."

"You believe, then, that the man seen by the waiter was actually the murderer?"

"I have no doubt of it. That spasmodic walk, that hesitancy, the looking back, and then hurrying on—all these indicated a mind engaged upon some agitating theme. The man was seen watching the window inside which Marie Prévol and her admirer were seated. He moved away when he saw himself observed. He had disguised

himself as much as he could, by turning up the collar of his coat. These are all details that point to one conclusion. The finding of the hat induced me to visit every shop in Saint Germain, where a hat could be bought. It was clear that the murderer could not have gone far from the forest bareheaded, without attracting attention. He must have got himself a hat somehow; and it was not long before I ascertained that a hat had been got. At the principal shop I was told that a boy, a *gamin*, had come in on the night of the murder, and had asked for a cloth traveling-cap. He had chosen one with flaps to protect the ears, a form of cap intended to give the utmost protection from cold. He paid for his purchase with a napoleon, and seemed in a great hurry to be gone, not even stopping to count his change. The shopkeeper had wondered at such a little ragamuffin being intrusted with a purchase of the kind. The man had been on the point of closing his shop, and, therefore, was quite positive as to the hour. It was his invariable habit to put up his shutters at nine o'clock, and the clock was striking as the boy came to the door of the shop, breathless and heated, as if he had been running for some distance."

"And you conclude that this traveling-cap was bought for the murderer?"

"Hear the sequel, and judge for yourself. I went from the hatter's to the railway station, and there, after having been bandied about from pillar to post, I succeeded in finding a tolerably intelligent official who remembered the night of the murder—then ten days passed—and who could recall most of the passengers who had left for Paris by the half-past nine o'clock train upon that particular night. The news of the murder had not been brought to the station before the starting of the train; a most criminal neglect on the part of the local police. No suspicious-looking person had been observed to enter the trains, but upon my questioning him closely the man remembered having noticed a traveler who wore a cloth cap with flaps over the ears—a seemingly needless protection upon a mild September evening. 'There is one who takes care of himself,' the railway official had thought. For the rest, this passenger had looked like a gentleman, tall, erect, well-built, a bigger man than the majority of Frenchmen—what the railway official permitted himself to call *un bel homme*. Had he appeared agitated, breathless, and in a hurry? No, the official had noticed nothing extraordinary in his manner. He had a return ticket for Paris. The train was scarcely out of the station when the police came to make inquiries. The murder had been known at the police station at a quarter-past eight, and it was not until after half-past nine that the police thought of setting a watch upon the railway station. That is how your rustic police favor the escape of a criminal."

"Did you trace your gentleman in the cloth cap any further?"

"Not an inch. No one had observed him at Saint Lazare, nor at any intermediate station where the train stopped. I wearied myself during the next six weeks in the endeavor to trace the man called Georges, who must have had some local habitation in Paris besides Marie Prévol's apartment. In vain. In no quarter of Paris could I hear of any apartment occupied by a man answering to the description of this man who called himself Georges—rich, independent,

handsome, in the prime of life. I could trace no such man among the prosperous classes of Paris, and my machinery for tracking any individual in the wilderness of Paris had hitherto proved almost infallible. This man baffled me. I 'touched on him' now and again, as you English say of your hunted fox, but I could never get upon a scent strong enough to follow; and in the end I gave up all hope of finding him. He must have sneaked out of France under the very noses of the police, for I had set a watch upon every probable exit from this country."

"No doubt he was clever enough to choose the improbable. Did you see much of Madame Lemarque after the murder?"

"No; my interest in her ceased when I gave up the case as hopeless. I had fresh cases—new interests, and the murder of Marie Prévol remained in my mind only as a tradition, until you recalled the story of the crime."

"I telegraphed yesterday to the principal of the Ursuline Convent at Dinan," said Mr. Heathcote, "and I have obtained from her the address at which Madame Lemarque was living two years ago, when her niece was sent back to Paris in company with other pupils. After leaving you I shall go to that address, and try to find Madame Lemarque. I may have the painful duty of informing her of her granddaughter's death; and yet I can but think that were the grandmother still living she must have heard of the girl's death, and would have communicated with the Cornish police."

"That is to suppose her more intelligent than the average Frenchwoman," said Drubarde, as if he belonged to another nation. "Suppose I accompany you in your search for Madame Lemarque. That ought to be interesting."

"I shall be delighted to secure your aid."

M. Drubarde and his guest descended the ladder. The detective put on a gray overcoat, which concealed and subjugated the airiness of his summer attire. He put on the hat of sober commonplace existence, and altogether contrived to make himself almost patriarchal before he left his lodging.

The street in which Mme. Lemarque had been living when the nuns of Dinan last heard of her was a narrow and shabby little street between St. Sulpice and the Luxembourg. The house was decently kept, and had a respectable air, and was evidently not one of those *caravansérais* where lodgers come and go with every term. It had a settled, sober air, and the brass plates upon the door told of permanent residents, with respectable avocations. One of these plates informed society that Mesdames Lemarque and Beauville, *Robes et Modes*, occupied the third floor. The staircase was clean and quiet, and the first sound that saluted Mr. Heathcote's ears as he went upstairs was the screech of a parrot, which became momentarily louder as the visitors approached the third floor.

On the door on the left of the landing appeared another brass plate—"Mesdames Lemarque et Beauville, Robes, Modes, Chapeaux."

Mr. Heathcote rang the bell. He felt curiously agitated at the thought that in the next minute he might be face to face with the dead girl's grandmother.

The door was opened by an elderly woman in black, very sallow,

very thin, with prominent cheek-bones, and hungry black eyes. She was neatly clad, her rusty silk gown fitting her fleshless form to perfection, her linen collar and cuffs spotlessly clean, her iron-gray hair carefully arranged; but poverty was stamped upon every fold of her gown, and written in every line upon her forehead.

"Madame Lemarque?" inquired Mr. Heathcote, while the *ci-devant* police-officer looked over his shoulder.

"No, I am not Madame Lemarque, but I am her business representative. Any orders intended for Madame Lemarque can be executed by me. I am Mademoiselle Beauville."

"Alas, mademoiselle, it is not a question of orders," replied Heathcote, in his most courteous tones. "I have come on a painful errand. I have to impart very sad news to Madame Lemarque."

Mlle. Beauville sighed and shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Madame Lemarque is lying at rest in a place where all the events of this earth are alike indifferent," she said. "Take the trouble to enter my humble apartment, gentlemen. Madame Lemarque was my partner and my friend."

Heathcote and his companion followed the dress-maker into her little *salon*, where a very old gray cockatoo was clambering upon a perch, seemingly in danger of doing himself to death head downward at every other minute. The *salon* was like the appearance of Mlle. Beauville, scrupulously neat, painfully pinched and spare. A poor little old-fashioned walnut table, polished to desperation, a cheap little china vase of common flowers, a carpet which covered only a small island in an ocean of red tiles, an old mahogany secretaire, with materials for writing and, by way of decoration, the fashion-plates of "Le Follet" neatly pinned against the dingy wall-paper. There was a work basket on the table, and Mlle. Beauville had apparently been busily remaking a very old gown of her own in order to keep her hand in during the dead season.

Mr. Heathcote discovered later that Mlle. Beauville cherished one bitter and unappeasable hatred, and that was against Messrs. Spricht, Van Korb, and the whole confraterinty of men-milliners.

"Then Madame Lemarque is dead, I apprehend, mademoiselle?"

"Madame Lemarque died last June."

"Suddenly?"

"No; she had been ailing for some time. But the end came more quickly than she expected. My poor friend had but a short time in which to arrange her affairs."

"Was her granddaughter, Leonie, living with her at the time of her death?"

"She was. But what do you know about Leonie?"

The ex-detective laid his hand hastily upon Mr. Heathcote's wrist before he could answer.

"Answer nothing until we have heard what she can tell us," he whispered.

"I know very little about her, but I am anxious to know more; and if you should be a loser by the waste of your time in answering my inquiries, I shall be most happy to recompense you for that loss," said Heathcote.

The spinster's hungry eyes sparkled. Decent poverty has depths unknown to the professed pauper. Mademoiselle's larder would

have exhibited a touching spectacle to the eye of the philosopher or physiologist. The philosopher would have wondered that woman can endure with such patience, the physiologist would have been surprised that humanity can sustain life upon so little. For weeks past Mlle. Beauville's most luxurious idea of dinner had been an egg. For the last week her daily ration had been two halfpenny rolls.

"Tell me all you can about your friend and her grandchild?" asked Heathcote, eagerly. "I am particularly interested in knowing everything; but as it is dry work talking, and as neither my friend nor I have lunched, it might be a good idea to get a bottle of Bordeaux and a few biscuits, if mademoiselle will permit us to refresh ourselves in her apartment."

His keen glance had noted the hollow cheeks and glittering eyes of the dress-maker, and he wanted an excuse for giving life and warmth to that impoverished form. Drubarde caught at the idea, thinking that his client's design was to loosen the lady's tongue by the agency of Bacchus. It was altogether an amateur's notion, crude, wanting in subtlety; but the genial Drubarde was willing to indulge a beginner who was feeling his way in the elements of a great art.

"I'll fetch a bottle of wine myself," he said, cheerily; "I know where I can get one close by, and of the best."

"Bring two," said Heathcote; "mademoiselle will accept the second by way of souvenir."

"Monsieur, do you wish to make me a drunkard? I have not tasted wine since my poor friend's death," said Mlle. Beauville, but there was a look in her face which told Heathcote that his gift would not be unwelcome.

Drubarde ran down-stairs like a boy, and was back in five minutes, carrying a couple of sealed bottles, labeled St. Estephe, and a large bag of biscuits.

Mademoiselle had set out a tray in the meantime, with her poor little stock of glasses, three in all, and one of those cracked, and an old china plate for the biscuits. Again her eyes glistened when she saw the bigness of the biscuit bag.

"Let me look at the name on the bag," said Heathcote.

Strange, it was the very name upon that biscuit bag which he carried at this moment, neatly folded in his pocket-book, the bag which had been found in the second-class carriage from which the girl fell.

"And now, mademoiselle, tell me all you can about your deceased friend and her granddaughter. You had known Madame Lemarque for some time, I conclude?"

"I had lived with her for nearly ten years."

"For nearly ten years! Then you must have joined your fortunes with hers very soon after the murder of her daughter, Marie Prévol?"

"You have heard of that terrible event, then, monsieur?" asked the dress-maker. "It is so long since it happened, that I thought it had been forgotten by all the world except me."

"No, mademoiselle, a tragedy so terrible as that can never be

forgotten by those who study the mystery of crime. I am keenly interested in tracing the murderer of Marie Prévol."

"After ten years!" exclaimed Mlle. Beauville, with an incredulous smile. "Only a dreamer could think of such a thing, monsieur."

"Then I am such a dreamer, mademoiselle, and I hope you will help me to realize my dream."

"Does monsieur know that Monsieur Mardoche, one of the most distinguished of our *Juges d'Instruction,* took up this case warmly —that the police were never more earnest than in their endeavor to find poor Marie Prévol's murderer? Does monsieur know that it was a double murder, and that Monsieur de Maucroix, a young man of high family and large fortune, was also a victim? Does monsieur suppose that his friends were idle—that no inducement was offered to the police?"

"I am aware of all this, mademoiselle, and I know that the cleverest police in the world—"

"Except Russia; we must always bow to the superior genius of the North," interjected M. Drubarde.

"I am aware that the police failed. But you must consider, mademoiselle, that when the police of Paris were keenest in their pursuit of the assassin, the assassin was most upon his guard. The consciousness of his crime, the horror of his position, intensified his intelligence. He had but one thought, to escape detection. His whole life was planned with that purpose. But now ten years have gone by—ten years of security—the murderer may be less guarded, more open to detection. He will have grown careless—foolhardy, even—believing that after such an interval detection must be impossible. If mademoiselle will do me the honor to touch glasses, we will discuss this question at our leisure."

He had filled the three glasses, but he had perceived that the dress-maker had a delicacy in drinking the wine he had provided, and he took up his glass and offered the edge of it to hers, and, emboldened by this friendly movement, the spinster clinked her glass against the rim of his, then against that of the patriarchal Drubarde, while the cockatoo, wondering at this unwonted revelry, screeched his loudest.

"To your good health, gentlemen," faltered the dress-maker, before she sipped her wine.

"To the speedy discovery of Marie Prévol's murderer," said Heathcote.

"Did you know our poor Marie, monsieur, that you are thus interested in her dark fate?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Oh, if you had but known her, I should understand your desire to revenge her death. She was so lovely. To know her was to adore her. Even a soured old maid such as I could but yield to her charm. She was as loving as she was lovable: a clinging disposition, a poetical nature. Her life was not blameless, perhaps, who knows? We will not scrutinize too closely. She was as different from those harpies whom one hears of in Paris as a wild rose in the hedge is different from a jewel that has gone the round of every Monte de Piété, in the city. Her heart was true to the last. She had no ambition but

to love and to be loved. The man who absorbed her life for a long time, whose hand perhaps slew her, was rich, lavish. He would have loaded her with gifts if she had let him—but to the last she preserved the same modest ideas—generous to others, careless to herself."

"Did you ever see the man who called himself Georges?"

"Never. He was a man of curious habits. He loved the night better than the day. Nothing delighted him more than a moonlight drive in the Bois after midnight. He patronized the restaurants that keep open half the night. Marie and he used to sup together at the Café de Paris, sometimes with one or two chosen friends—but much more often alone. I was not Madame Lemarque's partner at that time; but I occupied a room in the roof of this house, and I used to work by the day for madame and for Marie. I have spent many days working for her in the Rue de Lafitte. I made all her gowns, and I was proud that she should challenge comparison with actresses who squandered their thousands upon such impostors as Spricht and Van Korb. Imagine, monsieur, a man—a stern rugged nature, which can have no true feeling for the beauty of a woman's dress—a being of angles and hard lines—a creature without grace or *flou*. No wonder that square shoulders and pointed elbows have come into fashion since men have dictated the dress of women!"

Mademoiselle had mounted her hobby and was riding furiously—

"Doubtless, it is a mistake in art, and one that must be discovered before long," said Heathcote, soothingly; "but tell me, mademoiselle, in all your visits to the Rue de Lafitte did you never encounter this Monsieur Georges?"

"Never."

"Strange! And did your friend Mademoiselle Prévol talk much of this Monsieur Georges?"

"Yes, she used to talk to me a great deal about him at one time, poor child; I think she talked even more freely to me than to her mother. Mme. Lemarque was just a little too fond of money, too eager for gifts from her child, and that wounded Marie's generous nature. 'You value people only for what they can give you,' said she once to her mother. 'If Georges were Satan you would like him just as well—provided you got enough of his money.' And then there was a quarrel, as you may suppose, monsieur. There were excuses to be made for Madame Lemarque, poor soul. She had been rich once—an atelier in the Rue de la Paix—a country house at Asnières—but these man-milliners had spoiled her trade, and at this time she was very poor, living in those rooms which you see, and working for half a dozen shabby customers who ground her to the very dust by their meanness. And then when Marie gave her money she spent it recklessly—she ate and drank like a princess—she took a *voiture de place* whenever she went out; she thought that Marie could never do too much for her or her son's orphan child, Leonie."

"Leonie lived with her grandmother, did she not?"

"Yes, Madame Lemarque had kept her since she was three years old. It was a dull life for a child. She used to sit on a little stool in that corner, and thread needles for her grandmother. When she was eight years old she could work very neatly; she ran errands

too. She earned her daily bread, poor child. But her happiest days were those she spent with her aunt."

"Mademoiselle Prévol was good to her?"

"Good to her? Yes, and to every one who came in her way. I tell you she was a creature all sweetness and love."

"And was she devoted to this Monsieur Georges?"

"At one time, yes. It was an adoration on both sides. Marie used to tell me of their journeys in romantic countries under a southern sky; of their happy life far away among the crowd; of his boundless love for her, his generosity, his devotion. She had a fever in Venice, and he nursed her, and watched beside her bed day and night—thirteen days and thirteen nights—till she was out of danger. It was a love such as one reads of in poetry."

"Have you any reason to think that she was his lawful wife?"

"I can not tell. His constancy and devotion were those of the best of husbands. She wore a wedding-ring, and she was always called by his name when they traveled, as well as in her lodgings. It was almost at the beginning of their attachment that he took her to England. I have sometimes thought that they were married in England."

"Did he introduce her to his friends in Paris?"

"Only a few artists and writers whom she used to meet at supper. They were some of the wildest young men in Paris."

"But he introduced her to no ladies—to no families of good standing?"

"I doubt if he could have had any such friends. He lived too eccentric a life to cultivate what you call respectable acquaintance."

"Was he himself an artist?"

"I think not. He was too rich for a painter or an author."

"And you have never heard of him since Marie Prévol's death?"

"Never."

"What became of the jewels and other property which had belonged to Mademoiselle Prévol?"

"They were sold by her mother, who lived upon the proceeds of the sale for some years. She paid for Leonie's schooling out of the same fund. It was only in the last years of her life that she again became poor. She took me into partnership very soon after her daughter's death. She had sent the little girl to a convent, and she felt lonely and nervous in these rooms. Her spirits never recovered from the shock of that terrible murder—the horror of the night in which Leonie was brought home to her by the police from St. Germain, who told her the history of the murder. She invited me to share her apartment, and to work for her, taking half the profit of the business. The profits were of the smallest, but I had my board and lodging; and I was too fond of Madame Lemarque and of Jacko," added the spinster, looking fondly at the cockatoo.

"That is Madame Lemarque's parrot, I conclude?"

"Yes; he belonged to poor Marie. Ah! he could tell us a great deal, if he would but talk sense instead of repeating foolish songs. She bought him from a sailor at Marseilles, and brought him home with her after one of her autumn holidays. She used to teach him lines from the songs she sung at the theater."

"*Moi, je sui le rudis noir,*" shrieked the parrot.

"You were living with Madame Lemarque when her granddaughter returned from Dinan, I suppose?" said Heathcote.

"Ah! you seem to know all about it. Yes, I was with madame when she went to Saint Lazare to meet the child. Such a bright, pretty girl she had grown—so amiable and clever and industrious. I never thought she would act toward me as she has done."

"In what way has she acted badly."

"She went to England directly after her grandmother's death—that is more than two months ago—and she has not written to me once since then. No doubt she has found powerful friends—rich friends—and has no need of a poor old woman like me"

"There may be some other reason for her silence," said Heathcote, gravely.

"What other reason?"

"Some misfortune—an accident, perhaps. She had to travel by steamer and by railway. Might not something have happened?"

"I have thought of that sometimes," said the dress-maker, with a distressed look; "and if I had had a friend in England—one single friend—I should have written to ask that friend to make inquiries. But I have so few friends—hardly any one in Paris, no one outside Paris," she concluded, dejectedly.

"But surely you knew Leonie's errand? You knew to whom she was going? You might have written to that person."

"I know nothing. The girl's errand was a secret from me. On her death-bed Madame Lemarque gave her granddaughter some commission. There were letters or papers of some kind, I think, which she was to take to somebody in England, and that person was expected to befriend her. The grandmother was very secret about it. She would not speak to Leonie on the subject while I was in the room, but on re-entering rather suddenly I saw some papers on the bed. I overheard a few words—something about a friend of Monsieur Georges, rich, powerful."

"And it was to this friend of Georges, the murderer, that Leonie was to appeal for protection and help?"

"Remember we are not certain that Georges was the murderer. It is only a supposition."

"But a supposition so well grounded as to be almost certainty. An adoring lover, who disappears immediately after the murder of his mistress—a lover who had good ground for jealousy, and is known to have been madly jealous, mark you. A murder that could only be inspired by madness, or by jealousy. If these facts are not strong enough to condemn Monsieur Georges, what does circumstantial evidence mean?"

"Don't talk to me about it," muttered Drubarde, impatiently. "Georges was the murderer. The police were at fault in their search for him, but they were never in doubt as to his guilt."

"And it was to a friend of her daughter's murderer that Madame Lemarque sent her granddaughter?"

"What other resources had she, do you think?" exclaimed the dress-maker. "She was dying penniless, friendless, leaving her grandchild to the mercy of strangers. She knew that Monsieur Georges was a rich man, and that any friend of Monsieur Georges

was likely to be well off. I dare say she knew no more than the name of the friend."

"Did you hear the name?"

"Never. I heard her tell Leonie that the gentleman was in London. She would find him at some hotel, the name of which I forget."

"Would you recognize it if you heard it?" asked Heathcote.

"Perhaps. I am not sure."

He went over the names of the principal hotels, without success. Mlle. Beauville could not remember to have heard any one of them.

"You are sure that Mademoiselle Lemarque was to go to London," inquired Heathcote, "and no further than London? You heard no mention of Cornwall or Plymouth?"

He repeated the names of county and town—giving each the true Gallic intonation—but they suggested nothing to Mlle. Beauville.

"She was to go to London—nowhere else. But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you that presently. Did Leonie Lemarque leave Paris immediately after her grandmother's death?"

"She left the evening after the funeral. She did not even wait to get a mourning gown made. She had worn a black gown belonging to me at the funeral, and she changed it for her little gray gown before she left."

"Did she take no luggage?"

"Only a change of linen in a hand-bag."

"How did she travel?"

"She went from the Station du Nord at eight o'clock. I walked to the station with her, poor child. We were both very sad and very tired. She was to cross from Dover to Calais in the night, and she would arrive in London early next morning. She promised me to write on the day of her arrival. I told her that I thought it was a dangerous thing for a young girl to go alone to meet a stranger, a man whose face she had never seen. She said her grandmother had told her that he was a good and honorable man, and she was to trust him. She begged me not to ask her any questions. Her grandmother had warned her to say nothing worth telling me. When I pressed her to give me her confidence she began to cry, but I managed to find out that she was going to London with the idea of being placed in some rich and aristocratic family where she would be a companion to the children and teach them her own language. She was not accomplished enough to be a governess of a superior kind."

"How did she get the money for her journey?"

"Her grandmother gave it her on her death-bed, but as there had been hardly any money in the house for the last week of Madame Lemarque's illness, I concluded that this money had been sent from the person in England in reply to an application from Madame Lemarque."

"Did you post any English letter during your friend's illness?"

"I did not, but Leonie may have done so. She went out every day upon some errand or other. And now, monsieur, pray tell me how you came to know all about Leonie, and if you have any bad news for me?"

"Alas, mademoiselle, I have the worst possible news. Your young friend is dead."

"Dead! And there was no one to tell me. The gentleman who was to befriend her, to whom she went as to a protector and benefactor, he did not even take the trouble to tell me her fate."

"She may never have found him, poor child. She may have been lured away from her destination and from London by a villain. She met her death more than two hundred miles from London. She fell from a railway bridge, and was killed instantly; but whether that death was an accident or a murder no one yet knows except the Great Judge of all human actions."

"You believe it was—"

"Murder. I am here to discover the motive of that crime."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STUDENT OF MEN AND WOMEN.

THERE was a silence of some minutes, during which Mlle. Beauville wept quietly. And then Heathcote and the ex-police-officer rose to take leave.

"I thank you sincerely, mademoiselle, for having given me all the information in your power to give, and I must beg you to accept some small compensation for the time I have wasted," said Mr. Heathcote, slipping a couple of twenty-franc pieces into the dressmaker's hand.

The poor creature's eyes shone with a feverish light as her skinny fingers closed upon the gold. It was like manna dropped from heaven. Long and weary weeks had passed since her *robes et modes* had brought her so much money. Her chief customers of late had been the grisettes of the quarter, who had dribbled out their payments by two or three francs at a time, and who had exacted the maximum of labor for the minimum of pay. Mademoiselle's hollow cheeks were flushed with the warm red wine, her heart glowed with the thought that she could now pay her last term to the Harpagon landlord, not much worse, perhaps, than the rest of his species, but all landlords seem Harpagons when they claim their due from the penniless.

"Monsieur is too good, too generous," murmured the spinster; "I should refuse all remuneration, only work has been so slack of late—"

"Not one word, mademoiselle. Stay, I have one more question, and that an important one, to ask before I take my leave. Can you give me the exact date upon which Leonie Lemarque left Paris for Dover?"

"Assuredly, monsieur. It was on the fourth of July."

"The fourth! And it was on the evening of the fifth she met with her death. You say she carried a small hand-bag containing linen?"

"Yes. Her clothes were of the fewest, dear child, but everything she had was neat and nice of its kind. She had a change of linen with her."

"Had she nothing else in the bag?"

"Yes, I went into the room while she was packing, and I saw her put in a small packet sealed up in paper, which she took from under her pillow. I had seen the same packet under her grandmother's pillow before she died. It looked like a parcel of letters or papers of some kind."

"Do you know what station Leonie was to arrive at?"

"Yes. It was the terminus of Charing."

"Charing Cross?"

"Precisely. It was a double name like that."

"Good. Adieu, mademoiselle, my friend and I may come to you again perhaps to make further inquiries."

"You shall be very welcome, monsieur. And if you discover the secret of my poor young friend's fate you will tell me—"

"Assuredly."

"One word, monsieur. Where is poor little Leonie buried? Has she a decent grave in your English land?"

"She lies in a rustic church-yard under a great yew tree. There is a stone upon her grave with a brief record of when and how she met her death. Her name and age shall now be added to the inscription."

"Indeed, monsieur! But what kind friend was it who placed a stone over the grave of a nameless stranger?"

"That was my care. It was a very small thing to do."

"Ah, monsieur, it is in doing these small things that a great heart shows itself."

Mr. Heathcote and his companion made their adieux, accompanied to the landing by the spinster, who felt as if she had entertained angels unawares; but when the sound of their footsteps had died away upon the stairs, she went back to her room and wept over the fate of her young friend.

"I have nothing left in this world to love but you," she said, piteously, addressing the cockatoo, which screeched sympathetically.

It was one o'clock by the time Mr. Heathcote and M. Drubarde left the dress-maker's apartment, so the Englishman suggested a light luncheon at the Restaurant Laperousse, within a stone's throw of Drubarde's apartment; and the suggestion being received favorably by the ex-policeman, they were soon afterward seated at a little table, in a private room with a window overlooking the river, ready to do justice to the *plat du jour*, a *fricandeau aux épinards*, and a bottle of *Mouton-Rothschild*. The wine-bibbing at the dress-maker's apartment had been merely a benevolent excuse for providing the spinster with a little good Bordeaux.

"Now, Monsieur Drubarde, we are alone and at our ease. You have now all the facts of Leonie Lemarque's death well within your knowledge; and now give me your opinion."

"A very difficult case in which to come to a decided opinion," answered Drubarde. "At present my conclusions and yours are antagonistic. My niece wrote out a careful translation of your newspaper report. I have her translation in my pocket-book. You can look it over if you like to see that it is faithfully done. I have read it three or four times, with keenest attention, and I can so far see nothing out of the common in Leonie Lemarque's fate. A pretty girl traveling alone, a common ruffian, a common murder."

"And you see no link between this crime and that former murder?"

"Not a thread—not a hair. A deed done ten years ago—unpunished, the murderer undiscovered."

"Do you forget that Leonie went to London with credentials to a friend of this very murderer? Perhaps a friend so devoted, so bound to the guilty man, that he might not recoil from a new murder to get rid of the one witness of his friend's crime."

"To imagine that is to imagine an impossible friendship. Men do not risk their necks nowadays, whatever they may have done in the time of Damon and Pythias."

"Then you see nothing extraordinary or mysterious in the violent death of this girl, within twenty-four hours of her leaving Paris, carrying with her documents which may in some manner have betrayed the secret of the double murder? Perhaps a letter from the lover to his mistress, a letter written by a man maddened by jealousy, threatening to do the deed which was afterward done. You see no sufficient ground for connecting one crime with another, for seeking the secret of the second crime in the history of the first?"

"Honestly, I do not," replied Monsieur Drubarde, who had fastened his napkin under his chin, had nibbled a radish or two, and destroyed the symmetry of a dish of prawns, by way of preparation for the *fricandeau*. "I only wish I could see my way to such an opinion. It would make as pretty a case as ever I was concerned in. However, there is no knowing what new discoveries we may make, if we go to work patiently. My present view of the case is that Leonie Lemarque, being young, silly, and inexperienced, and not knowing a word of English, altogether a wrong person to make such a journey alone, got into bad hands at the very beginning. I believe that, instead of meeting this person who was to have befriended her, and who must have been a man of standing and respectability, or the old grandmother would not have sent her to him, she fell into the hands of a scoundrel and was lured in to your train for Cornwall."

"You must remember that Paddington Station is some miles from Charing Cross," said Heathcote; "the girl could not be smuggled from one train to the other unawares. She must have traversed half London on foot, or in a conveyance of some kind."

"Possibly. But, as likely as not, she was in the companionship of the wrong man. Consider her ignorance, her helplessness. What an easy prey for a villain!"

Edward Heathcote was unconvinced.

"I can not imagine a crime so motiveless as that which you suggest," he said, thoughtfully.

He began to lose faith in the old sleuth-hound. He began to think that André Drubarde was worn out; that scent, and pace, and tongue were things of the past. He began to think that the work of finding the link between the two crimes must be done by himself rather than by Drubarde.

"What became of the girl's bag?" asked Drubarde, after he had eaten a liberal portion of veal and spinach. "There is no mention of a bag in your newspaper."

"There was no bag found. If there had been the victim might have been identified earlier."

"And the sealed packet?"

"There was no packet. There was nothing but a little basket containing a few cherries and a biscuit bag. There was no clew to identity. The murderer had done his work well."

"The best thing you can do is to put Mr. Distin in possession of the details you heard from Mademoiselle Beauville. He can make inquiries at the Charing Cross Station, where it is just possible the girl may be remembered by some of the porters. A girl traveling alone, and meeting a gentleman on the platform. The meeting may have been observed, even there, where crowds meet and part every hour. Railway officials are observant and keen-witted. It is within the limits of the possible that this poor girl may not have passed altogether unremarked."

"I will write to Distin this afternoon," said Heathcote. "And there is another thing I can do. If your theory is correct, Leonie Lemarque missed the person who was to have met her at the station, and fell into bad hands. If that is so the fact ought to be arrived at easily by an appeal to the person whom she should have met."

He took out his pencil and pocket-book, and wrote the rough draft of an advertisement:—

"The person who was to have met Leonie Lemarque at Charing Cross Station on the morning of July 5th last, is earnestly requested to communicate immediately with Messrs. Distin & Son, Furnival's Inn."

He read a free translation of this advertisement to Monsieur Drubarde.

"Yes, that is a wise test," said the police-officer. "I see you have the true *flair*. If the man is innocent he will answer that advertisement—always supposing that it come to his knowledge."

"I will repeat it so often in the 'Times,' that it will not be easy for the appeal to escape his knowledge," answered Heathcote.

"Then if there is no sign we shall say guilty," said Drubarde.

"And in that case we have to find the villain."

"You may add a postscript to your letter to Monsieur Distin, advising him to inquire at the cloak-room of Charing Cross Station for an unclaimed hand-bag left there on July the 5th. Something must have been done with that hand-bag, and, in our civilized condition it is not easy to get rid of even a hand-bag."

After having made this suggestion M. Drubarde devoted himself entirely to the pleasures of the table. Mr. Heathcote ate very little, and was too troubled in mind to know what to eat. He saw himself no nearer a solution of the problem which he had pledged himself to solve. Yet this he felt, that the sky was growing clearer round Bothwell Grahame. The secret of the girl's death seemed to lie between the man whom she was to have met at Charing Cross and the phenomenal villain of Drubarde's imagination, who had lured her into the Cornish train with darkest intent.

He left André Drubarde directly after luncheon, and walked back to the Hotel de Bade, where he devoted the afternoon to his correspondence. He wrote at fullest length to George Distin, in-

closing the advertisement in the "Times," with a check, and an order for its daily appearance until further notice. He wrote a cheery letter to Hilda, telling her to be hopeful; and he wrote to Mrs. Wyllard, telling her that the result of his investigations up to the present hour had gone far to dispel his suspicion of her cousin's guilt.

"I am still groping in the dark," he concluded, "and am very far from having achieved any tangible result, but I am working with all my mind and all my strength, and I hope that Providence will not compel me to abandon my task until I have fathomed the mystery of Leonie Lemarque's death."

He wrote thus, unconsciously, forgetting that Dora Wyllard did not know even the name of the victim. The discovery of the girl's identity, made three days ago, at Dinan, seemed to him an old history, so exclusively had his mind dwelt upon this one subject during the reveries of that period. The fact that the name must be a new thing to Dora never struck him.

He dined alone in his private sitting-room, he who at any other time would have enjoyed the glitter and life of the Boulevard in all its evening brilliancy. He wanted to be free from all sound and movement, from the sight of strange faces, so that his mind should work undisturbed upon the problem he had set himself to solve.

And now over his solitary cutlet, with his pocket-book open before him, he marshaled his facts, and reflected upon each detail of the story.

The murderer of Marie Prévol and Gustave Maucroix had escaped, and in all probability was still living. He appeared to have been rich, independent of all ties, a Bohemian in his habits, a man who could live in any country. Hardly possible that such a man would remain within a narrow radius of the scene of his crime—not to be looked for assuredly in Paris, or even in France. Far more likely that he had crossed the Atlantic, and sunk his identity in that wider, freer society of the United States, where money and cleverness outweigh a man's antecedents, where no one asks what a man has been, only what he is, or is worth in the present. Or it might be that such a man as this Georges, a night-bird, a man of fervid temperament, a lover of pleasure rather than work, unambitious, a voluptuary, would turn his face to Southern America, and dream away the after stages of an exhausted life in some romantic city upon the sea-board of the Pacific. Not in Europe—or not in the accessible quarters of Europe should he be sought for.

But in the meantime, here, in this city of Paris, there was something to be done. Vain to look for the man himself, perhaps; but those who had known the man, his chosen friends, the companions of his midnight orgies, might still be found. From them the man's antecedents might be learned; and possibly some glimmer of light could be obtained as to his adventures and whereabouts after the murder.

Edward Heathcote reviewed his Parisian acquaintance in search of such men as might be likely to have known this M. Georges. It was almost impossible for a man, spending his money lavishly, the favored admirer of a beautiful actress, not to be in some measure a

man of mark, and very widely known in the faster section of Parisian society.

Mr. Heathcote knew his Paris well, and loved it well. After that bitter loss, which had changed the current of his life, he had found hard work in his office his first best cure, and next best to hard, mental labor he had found relief of mind in the society of the artistic and keen-witted idlers of the Boulevard and the Bohemian club. He had found a week in Paris—a week of Boulevard idleness and Boulevard society—the best remedy for the dullness and the depression that comes from an unsatisfied heart and an overworked brain; and in these occasional plunges into Parisian society he had made a wider acquaintance with the artistic classes than it is often granted to a provincial Englishman to make.

He ran over the names of the men he knew best in Paris, trying to hit upon the likeliest person to suit his purpose. It must be a man who had been well to the fore ten years ago, when Marie Prévol was a famous beauty, and her lover was spending his nights and his fortune on the Boulevard. It should not be difficult, he thought, to hit upon such a man.

"Volney Dugarge, Bize, Pontruche, Trottier. Yes, Trottier. That is the man; a thorough-going Bohemian, a haunter of supper-tables and gambling dens, a hanger-on of lorettes, steeped to the tips of his nails in the atmosphere of the *demi monde*, a friend of Gautier, and Nerval, and Rochefort, an *habitué* of the Boulevard theaters; poor, keen-witted, a member of the band of paragraphists, the men who invent scandals, political, social, literary, theatrical, according to the prevailing demand, who write smart paragraphs for the most audacious of the newspapers, puffs for enterprising tradesmen."

Trottier, thus humble in his pursuits, a man utterly without pride, or, as his enemies said, without self-respect, was one of the most agreeable men in Paris. He had been a Boulevardier for the last thirty years, had seen the Boulevard extend its glittering length into regions which he remembered as a dreary wilderness of darkness and poverty. He remembered the time when the Palais Royal was the focus of Parisian gayety, the very temple of fashion and taste.

"If this man Georges had any status in Bohemian society, Sigismond Trottier must have known him," thought Heathcote.

The next thing was to find Trottier. He was a man who only began to live after dinner. He might be looked for on the Boulevard between nine o'clock and midnight. He might be found at a club much favored by actors and journalists, a club which had taken for itself a name from the history of the mediæval drama and rejoiced in the title of "Les Enfants Sans Souci," more briefly known as the "Sans Souci." The "Sans Souci" had its nest on an *entresol* in the Rue Vivienne, six low-ceiled rooms opening one out of another, three of them furnished with divans in true Oriental style. These were the smoking-rooms. Then came a fourth and much more spacious apartment provided with numerous small tables, writing materials, and the newspapers. Tapestried *portières* on the right and left of the fire-place in this reading-room opened into the sanctuary of the club, two medium-sized rooms, furnished with green cloth

tables for baccarat, thickly curtained, thickly carpeted, lighted only from the court-yard of the house, which was like a dry well. Edward Heathcote strolled along the Boulevard, looking for his friend as he went. It was nearly ten o'clock—a delicious night, balmy, starlit, summer-like—a night upon which Sigismond Trottier might naturally have been found seated amidst the idlers grouped on the asphalt in front of a popular *café*. But in the groups which Heathcote passed between the Hôtel de Bade and the corner of the Place de la Bourse there was no sign of Trottier's keen, ferret face and long gray hair. So the Englishman continued his walk to the Rue Vivienne, and entered the lamp-lit hall which led to the mysteries of the "Sans Souci."

He had been taken there more than once by Trottier, and had been amused and interested by the people he met.

"Can you tell me if Monsieur Trottier is here this evening?" he asked of the porter.

"Yes, monsieur. He came half an hour ago. Monsieur generally comes here at the same hour every evening to write his article for the 'Taon.'"

The rooms were almost empty. Neither journalists nor actors mustered strong before midnight. In a comfortable corner of the writing-room, at a little table brilliantly lighted by a green-shaded lamp, Edward Heathcote found the man he came to seek.

He was at least sixty years of age, tall, spare to attenuation, with long, narrow face of almost livid pallor, and long gray hair, falling over a greasy olive-green velvet collar, choice ornament of a threadbare and faded olive-green frock-coat. His jaw was narrow and projecting, his lips thin and pinched, his nose long and sharp, his eyebrows gray and shaggy. The only feature that gave life or color to the face was the restless and brilliant black eye—small, keen, observant—the eye of a creature always on the watch. Ah! how many of the darkest mysteries of Paris had that keen glance discovered; how many a loathsome depth had that ruthless gaze explored, how many a social ulcer, how many a domestic disease, how many a wound of heart and honor, how many an atrophy of purse had that eye pierced and scrutinized, while all the rest of the world was still blind to the coming ruin, the inevitable disgrace! Sigismond Trottier was a student of society. It was his boast that he knew this Paris of the Republic as well as Saint Simon knew the Paris of the great Louis; knew it in all its strength, and in all its weakness; knew it to the core of its rotten heart.

Needless to say that such a man was invaluable as a paragraphist. He had the same keen scent for a scandal that the well-trained detective has for a crime. A whisper, a shrug, was enough to put him on the right track. He was a genius at that modern style of hint and innuendo which just stops short of libel. He had killed more repuations than any man in Paris, and he had never been to prison. His safety lay in the keenness of his perception, which never allowed him to fall into such mistakes as have ruined other society-gossips. Whatever Sigismond Trottier wrote was true. He had an extraordinary power of winnowing the chaff from the corn in the floating scandals of the Boulevard. He knew what to accept and what to reject. His judgment was infallible. When Parisian

society saw the hint of an elopement, the suggestion of a marital wrong signed by Sigismond's hieroglyphic—an Egyptian beetle—the thing was received as a fact. The pen of the unerring recorder had proclaimed a truth. Happily, he was not a cur, though a professional assailant of man's honor and woman's reputation. He had given good proof of his courage on several occasions, had stood up before famous swordsmen, had faced marksmen of repute. That deep dint in his lean and livid cheek was the mark of a bullet from the Duke of Midlothian's pistol—that famous *viveur* who expired suddenly amidst the fading flowers and flaring tapers of a Boulevard supper-room—the very spirit of reckless gayety and wildest dissipation extinguished in a breath. That long slanting scar upon the left jaw, a shade more livid than the normal lividity of the complexion, was the result of a little sword-play between the Boulevard chronicler and the Marquis du Bois-Chaufonds, the reminiscence of a duel which set all Paris talking twenty years ago, when the Walewska was in the zenith of her charms. From scalp to sole the paragraphist could have shown the scars of past battles. He had never been known to refuse a challenge.

The paragraphist was so absorbed in his task when Heathcote approached his table as to be quite unconscious of any one's presence. Heathcote seated himself upon the other side of the table, and took up a newspaper, to wait till the journalist came to the end of a sheet.

He had not long to wait. Before he had read more than half a dozen paragraphs in the "Taon," each signed with the familiar beetle, Sigismond paused to blot a page, looked up, and recognized his English acquaintance.

"Good-evening," he said. Then with a vast effort he burst into English, and exclaimed, "'Owderyoudo," all as one word, having achieved which feat he laughed long and loud, surprised at his own talent for foreign tongues. "We begin to talk your language of horses, we others," he said, triumphantly. "We have taken all your words for the sport, and now we begin to take your greetings and salutations, your shake-hand, your 'owderyoudo. And what brings you to Paris, Monsieur Ettcott, at the dead season?"

"I should rather ask what you, chosen chronicler of fashionable society, can find to record in the dead season?"

"My dear friend, the worst scandals are those that happen in the dead season, when Paris is a desert, and a man thinks he can murder his neighbor or run away with his neighbor's wife with equal impunity. Ah, my friend, for the development of intrigue, for the ripening of social mysteries, the working out of domestic tragedies, there can be no better time than this dull, blank interval of the year, when there is no one in Paris. What stolen meetings, what little suppers in closely-sealed cabinets, when madame is at the sea-side and monsieur is shooting wild boar in Auvergne. Heaven only forbid that monsieur and madame should happen to take their supper in adjacent cabinets, and that monsieur should recognize the voice of madame on the other side of the lath and plaster. Yes, there is no richer harvest-time for the chronicler than the season when there is not a mortal in Paris."

"Cynic," exclaimed Heathcote. "And so you live still by exposing the faults and follies of your fellow creatures."

"I try to reform them by proving to them that sooner or later all social secrets are known. I am about the only preacher whose sermons scare them nowadays."

"Then you consider your trade a strictly honorable one, no doubt?"

"In French, no doubt means perhaps," replied Trottier, "*vide* Michelet. No, I will say nothing for my calling, except that a man must live. You may not see the necessity of my living, but the existence of the lowest of us has its value to the man himself. The world might get on very well without me, but I can't get on without the world."

"A man of your talent might have done well in any other line—"

"Pardon; mine is not a talent. It is a specialty. I should have succeeded in no other line. If I had been rich and high placed, like St. Simon, I should have kept my impressions to myself while I lived, and should have left a big book behind me when I died. But I am poor and a nobody, so I have had to live upon my impressions."

"You put the case neatly," said Heathcote, "and you are right; we are most of us the thing which circumstances make us. The man who will not allow himself to be molded by circumstances, who will strike out into the empyrean of ideal good, is one man in a thousand."

"I should not care to aspire to such eccentricity," said Trottier.

"You have not finished your evening's work, I suppose?"

"No, I am in for another hour."

"Good," said Heathcote, "then at midnight you will be free. Will you sup with me at the Café de Paris when your work is done? I believe it is in your power to do me a material service, merely by calling upon your memories of the past. Will you meet me at the Café de Paris at twelve?"

"With pleasure, and if my poor memories of men and events can help you, the record is at your service."

"A thousand thanks. I will go and order supper, and stroll on the Boulevard till it is ready. *Au revoir!*"

"Until midnight."

Sigismond Trottier was a man who kept his appointments. He was not neat in his person, or punctual in his payments. He never went to church, and he did not always wash. But if he promised a page of copy to a newspaper, the page was delivered in due time. If he offered to frank a friend to the theater, in his quality as critic, he was waiting in the vestibule at the appointed hour, ready to keep his word. If he accepted an invitation to supper, he never kept his host waiting. An invitation to dinner he always declined.

"A dinner-party is an anti-climax," he protested. "A man gets drunk too soon, and spoils his evening."

At midnight, M. Trottier's evening began, and he was ready for the feast.

Mr. Heathcote received him in one of the coziest little rooms in the *café*. The Englishman's first act on entering had been to light

all the wax candles on the mantel-piece which the waiters had left unlighted. This established him at once as a man who knew his Paris, and his choice of wines strengthening his position, everything was ready when Trottier's shabby olive-green coat came meekly into the radiance of the wax-candles. Trottier was known at the Café de Paris, and his shabby coat commanded the reverence of the waiters. Was he not a man who as it were carried reputations in his pocket, who could make a head waiter famous by a stroke of his pen?

The supper was delicate, *recherché*, Parisian; the wine was Johannisberger of princely quality, and a magnum of Heidsieck appeared with the last course. The two men talked of general topics during supper. It was only when the waiters had withdrawn, and when Sigismond Trottier had thrown himself back in his chair and lighted his cigarette, that Mr. Heathcote approached the business of the evening. It was half-past one o'clock, and the roll of wheels upon the asphalt below the open window had been gradually growing rarer. There was no longer the roar of the Boulevard to disturb the speakers.

"If I can be of the slightest use to you—as an embodied chronicle of Paris—command me," said Trottier. "Here I am at your service—an open book. You have only to turn my leaves."

"Do you remember a double murder—the murder of an actress and her lover—which happened ten years ago, in the forest of St. Germain?"

"Do I remember? Yes, as if the thing had happened last week; and for a good reason. The man who was suspected—the lover, or as some thought, the husband of the actress—was my familiar friend."

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Heathcote, almost starting from his chair. "Then my instinct was right. It told me that I should get on the track of that man—it told me that you must have known him."

"The man was well known to me and to a chosen few, but only a few," replied Trottier. "He was a man of eccentric habits—a man of talent and large intellect, who could afford to live his own life, and lived it. What he did with himself in the day none of us knew; whether he slept away half his daylight life, or shut himself in his den and smoked, and dreamed, and read. The latter hypothesis seemed likely enough, for he was a man who had read widely. He was a delightful companion—brilliant, genial, lavish to his friends—a splendid host. I have supped with him and Marie Prévol many a night in this house—sometimes a cozy trio, sometimes with that small choice circle with which he occasionally surrounded himself."

"Then I take it that he was known in general society, either the uppermost or the middle circles."

"Not the least in the world. He was a man who scorned society, hated ceremonies and conventionalities. I never saw him in a dress suit. I doubt if he possessed one. When he went to a theater it was to sit in a shadowy corner, where he could see without being seen. He detested crowds. He had nothing to gain from the

great world, and could afford to outrage all its rules and regulations."

"Was he a thoroughbred Parisian?"

"Far from it. He was an American—a French Canadian, I believe, but had lived so long in Paris as to be almost as Parisian as a citizen born and bred."

"Had he made his money or inherited it?"

"Inherited it, without doubt. His habits were those of the spender, not the worker. He was one of the lilies of the field, who toil not, neither do they spin. I take it that his father had been one of those daring speculators who in America become millionaires in a year or two. As for the man himself, he had no more idea of business or finance than one of those dressed-up dolls of the Quartier Breda. He took not the faintest interest in the transactions of the Bourse, and in that point alone revealed himself as no true Parisian."

"Do you believe that he committed the murder?" asked Heathcote.

Sigismond Trottier shrugged his shoulders, and shook back his long gray hair, as he slowly puffed his seventeenth cigarette.

"Who knows?" he said. "I liked the man so well that I should hesitate at saying I believe in his guilt. And yet the fact of his disappearance from the hour of the murder is almost conclusive evidence. And I know that he was savagely jealous of Maucroix."

"You judged him a man of strong passions, a man capable of a great crime?"

"Yes; he was a man of intense feeling—strong for good or evil. A volcano glowed under that calm outward aspect—that easy-going devil-may-care manner of his. I was very sorry for him. If Marie had been but true—"

"You believe that she was his wife?"

"I do. His manner to her was in all respects the manner of one who esteemed as well as loved her. He introduced her to his friends as his wife. He loved her too well to have refused her that title."

"But for a man who scorned conventionalities, what reason could there have been for concealment? Why should he not have introduced his actress wife to society? Why should he not have established a home?"

"The first question is easily answered. As he loathed society for himself, he would hardly court it for his wife. The second can only be answered by the fact that the man was an eccentric. He preferred the freedom of an actress's lodging to the restrictions of a rich man's house. His happiest days were spent wandering southward with the swallows; yet so strange was the man's temper that he never stayed more than a fortnight or three weeks away from Paris. The city seemed to draw him back like a magnet."

"Yet he had no business here?"

"None that I ever discovered. He must have loved the city for its own sake. He was here all through the siege and the Commune. I have heard him say that the happiest days of his life were those on which the roar of the Prussian guns made his music, and when Marie and he used to crouch and shiver over a handful of charcoal and eat a supper of dry bread and French plums."

"He must have had some *pied à terre* of his own, I conclude."

"He must have had his den somewhere in Paris, but none of us knew where it was. The only address he ever gave was that of Marie Prévol, *alias* Madame Georges, in the Rue Lafitte. He met his friends on the Boulevard when the theaters were over. He was a man who enjoyed life to the full—after his own fashion. He was the very life of his little circle—a daring wit, a bold politician, a trenchant critic. Paris is the city of brilliant talkers, yet I have known few who surpassed Georges as a conversationalist. I can see him now, with his long fair hair falling over his flashing eyes, his sarcastic lip, and the proud carriage of that leonine head. Not a common man by any means, and with a laugh that was like music—a man for a woman to adore—and yet Marie wavered in her fidelity directly an aristocratic dandy made love to her."

"You have no idea what became of Georges after the murder?"

"If I had, I would not tell you. No, I have not the faintest inkling. He vanished as a bubble that bursts upon the surface of a stream. As a mere guess, I should say that he went back to the country of his birth—that if he is still living, he is to be found in America under another name."

"He was a rich man, you say. It is easier for a man to betake himself from one country to another than to transfer his fortune. What became of this man's French investments?"

"He may never have had any such investments. His fortune may have been invested solely in America. He was a man who declared that he valued liberty above all other blessings—he would scarcely have fettered himself by investing any portion of his wealth in a country where he was leading a life of pleasure, living as a pure Bohemian. His utter indifference to all rumors about the Bourse would show that he had no French investments. His wealth, I take it, came from some secure source on the other side of the Atlantic."

"Did you ever hear him talk of an English friend, or a friend who resided in England?"

"No."

"And yet he must have had some such friend," said Heathcote.

He related the story of Leonie Lemarque's death, and the inducement that had taken her to England, where she was to have met a friend of her aunt's long-vanished lover. Sigismond Trottier listened with keenest interest. All social mysteries, whether criminal or not, had a charm for him.

"It is a very strange case," he said, "and I don't wonder that you are following it up earnestly. No, I never heard Georges mention any English friend. It was a bold stroke for the grandmother to send the girl to a man who was a friend of the murderer of her daughter. A drowning man will catch at a straw, says your proverb; and this poor woman—penniless and friendless on her death-bed—may have caught at the name of the only rich man upon whom she could advance the faintest claim. And what was the nature of that claim? A packet of Georges' love letters. Compromising love-letters, perhaps, to be offered to Georges' friend as the price of protection and aid for the orphan girl. A very strange story. And no one knows what became of those letters?"

"No one, as yet. No letters were found upon the girl. Even the hand-bag she carried with her had disappeared."

"A strange story. I wish I could help you to read the riddle. Your interest in it I imagine to be something beyond the mere artistic interest in a curious case."

"Yes; I am concerned in arriving at the truth, for the sake of one whom I honor and revere. I shall be deeply grateful if you can help me."

"Then I will help you," answered the paragraphist, quietly; and Edward Heathcote felt that in this amateur detective he had a stronger ally than in the old police-officer of the left bank.

CHAPTER XIV.

BOTHWELL BEGINS TO SEE HIS WAY.

DREARY days followed for Bothwell Grahame after that final interview with Lady Valeria. He had broken his bonds, he had escaped from the Circe whose fatal spells had held him captive so long. He was his own man again, he could stand up before his fellow-men and fear no reproach—nay, he could even dare to meet that kind old man whose friendship had never been withheld from him. He could look General Harborough in the face and clasp his hand without feeling himself a craven and a traitor, and that is a thing which he had not been able to do for the last three years.

He wasrelieved, rejoiced at the breaking of that old tie, and yet there was a touch of pain in such a parting. There came a bitter pang of remorse now and again to disturb his sense of newly-recovered peace. Such severances can never happen without pain. A man can but remember that such things were, and were most dear. To be utterly indifferent to the agony of a woman he has once loved a man must have a heart of stone. Bothwell was not stony-hearted. He knew that Valeria Harborough was not a good woman—that she had been shamefully false to the best of husbands—that she had abandoned herself recklessly, madly, to the promptings of a fatal passion. But he had loved her once, and his heart bled for her now in her misery and abandonment. He was haunted by the vision of her face as she had risen up before him, white as the very dead, her eyes flashing, her lips quivering, her voice subdued by passion to a serpent-like hiss, as she told him—

"You are in love with another woman!"

Yes, that was what it all came to. That was the sum-total of his scruples, his remorse of conscience; or at least that is what it must needs seem in the sight of the woman he abandoned. She would give him no credit for many a remorseful pang, many a sting of conscience in the past; yes, even in the noontide of passion, when he deemed that for him Fate held not the possibility of another love. In her sight he was a perjurer and a hypocrite. It was hard so to appear to the woman who had worshiped him; hard to know that there was a heart breaking for him yonder in the Italian villa on the hill above the sea.

"Why should I grieve about her?" he asked himself, angrily.

"I must be a coxcomb to fancy that she is making herself unhappy for my sake. She was angry with me the other day. It was rage, not wounded love, that flashed from those brilliant eyes of hers; the rage of slighted beauty. She is far more concerned for her losses on the turf than at the loss of me. If my Dido mounts the funeral pyre it will be because she has made a bad book, and not for my sake."

But argue with himself as he might, Bothwell could not forget the agony in the face that had once been his delight, the despair in the voice which had bidden him farewell, the tremulous hand which had snatched the love-token to fling it away in deepest scorn.

Perhaps Bothwell would have more easily forgotten these things if he could have had the comfort of Hilda's society at this period of his life. But Hilda and the twins and Fräulein Meyerstein had all gone off to Dawlish for sea-bathing, and Mrs. Wyllard warned her cousin that he must not attempt to follow them.

"You are on your probation, my poor Bothwell," she said, "and you must be very careful how you act. If you were to go to Dawlish, you would only distress Hilda, who has promised not to see you till her brother returns."

"I am not going there. I would not distress her for worlds. I am to wait patiently till Heathcote has made up his mind that I am not in the habit of throwing girls over viaducts; and then I may go to my darling, and claim her promise. In the meantime, I can at least write to her."

And he did write within a few hours of his final interview with Lady Valeria:—

"My Dearest,—I am my own man again. I am free, or as free as a man can be who is your most abject slave. I am told that I am not to be allowed to see you till I stand acquitted of the crime which Bodmin has judged me quite capable of committing. I think, little as you know of me, you know enough to be very sure that I am innocent upon that count.

"But there was another count upon which I confess myself guilty, Hilda, and it was that old sin which made me hang back when I longed to tell you my love. I have been guilty of a foolish attachment to a married woman—an attachment which lasted with varying fervor for over a year, but which had quite worn itself out before I left India. The flame had burned fiercely enough for a little while, and then came total extinction. Only it is not always easy for a man to shake off old fetters; and it was not till your pure and noble love gave me courage that I dared to stand up boldly and say—'That old false love is dead; let us bury it decently.' And now the old love is buried, Hilda, and I am all your own. No one is any the worse for that old sentimental folly. Such flirtations are going on in India every day. Some end in guilt and misery, no doubt; but there are more that finish as mine has finished, like the blowing out of a candle.

"Can you forgive me, dear one, for having once cared for another? Remember, it was before I knew you. Henceforward I am yours, and yours only. I claim your dear promise. I ask you to engage yourself to a man whom Bodmin looks upon askance as

a possible murderer. No, love, I will not exact so much. I will only tell you that I am all your own, and that I adore you. We will not talk about engagements till your brother comes back from Paris, convinced of my innocence as to that one particular charge, and until Bodmin has begun to forget that it ever suspected me.

"Your adoring

"BOTHWELL."

Having written this letter, Bothwell had nothing to do but to ride about the hills, thinking of his sweetheart, till he received her answer.

She wrote with unstinted tenderness, and recoiled in nowise from the fulfillment of her promise.

"I hold myself engaged to you henceforward, dear Bothwell," she wrote, "through good or evil fortune, good or evil report. But as I have promised my brother not to see you while he is away, it might be well that we did not write to each other again until he has returned. I think you know that I am steadfast, and that you can trust me."

Yes, he was very sure of her steadfastness. Was she not one woman in a thousand to have pledged herself to him just when any ordinary woman would have shunned him—would have recoiled from him as from some savage monster. She had been calm, and steadfast, and unfearing, a woman who could dare to judge for herself.

And now Bothwell Grahame felt that he had crossed the threshold of a new life. He was no longer a solitary waif, with no one to think of but himself. He had not only his own future to work out with patience and courage. He had to think of the young wife, whom it might be his to claim before he was much older. He could no longer afford to be vague and wavering. The problem of a gentlemanlike maintenance must be worked out by him, somehow, and without loss of time.

He walked across the Cornish hills in those balmy afternoons of September, full of thought and full of care; happy, yes, ineffably happy, in the knowledge of Hilda's love; but care went along with happiness. He had to provide for his beloved. Long and thoughtful self-examination brought him to one positive conclusion about himself. Whatever he was to do in the future, if he were to do it well, must be, in somewise, the thing that he had done in the past. He was a soldier to the marrow of his bones, and it was in military work or military studies that he must find his future living.

This was the plan which he worked out for himself during those solitary rambles on the moor, sometimes with gun and dogs, sometimes with no companion save his own thoughts. He would fall back upon the studious habits of his earlier years, work at the science of soldiery as he had worked then. He would take a house in one of the villages on the wild coast of North Cornwall—at Trevenna perhaps, in King Arthur's country, some roomy old house with a good garden, and he would take pupils to cram for the military examinations. He knew that he could get on with young men. He had always been popular with the subalterns of his regiment.

He would work honestly, conscientiously, devotedly as ever coach or crammer worked since the art of coaching and cramming was first invented. It would be a jog-trot, humble kind of life, a life which could never lead to distinction, far from a brilliant future to offer to such a girl as Hilda Heathcote. Yet he told himself that it was such a life as would not be altogether distasteful to her. It was a life in which husband and wife need be rarely parted, in which all their amusements and relaxations could be shared. They could hunt, and shoot, and ride, and boat together on that wild coast. The conventionalities would cost them very little. Fine clothes, fine living would not be required of them; and in their rustic seclusion they would escape the ghastly struggle to maintain showy appearances; they could afford themselves all the comforts of a homely, unpretentious *menage*.

Bothwell felt that it was in him to do good and honest work in such a career as this; surely better than sheep-breeding or gold-digging in some savage quarter of the earth, where the intellectual man must gradually sink into the brute. He pictured to himself the tranquil happiness of such a life. The long morning of conscientious work, followed by the afternoon ride or ramble. The summer holiday after a successful term; the adventurous excursion among Scottish lakes, or in some foreign land; the cherished home, gradually developed and improved from its primitive homeliness into a thing of beauty. The garden in which wife and husband and pupils worked together toward the attainment of a lofty ideal. The union of a household which should be as one family.

Cheered by such visions Bothwell took up his old technical books with an almost rabid hunger for study. He sent to London for the newest treatises on gunnery. He flung himself with heart and mind into the one line of study which had always interested him. Hilda had told him not to write to her, but he could not deny himself the delight of unfolding his newly-formed plan, which he explained to her upon five sheets of closely-written note-paper.

"Let me have just one more letter from you, dearest," he pleaded in conclusion, "to tell me what you think of my scheme, and where we ought to look for a house. Shall it be Trevenna, or Boscastle, or Padstowe, or New Quay? I think we ought to be near the sea, so that our lads may get plenty of boating and swimming. And I could teach you to row. We would live at least half our lives in the open air, and we would study natural history in all its branches. I fancy myself an ideal coach. I know my pupils would adore me, while you would be to them as a divinity. Our evenings could be devoted to music—we could get up one of Sullivan's operas, and perform for the benefit of the school or the church. We should be the most useful people in our parish. It would be a humble, jog-trot life, darling; but I believe it would be a happy one for both of us. I know that for me it would be Paradise."

The answer came by return post.

"Yes, dear Bothwell, your scheme is charming. Trevenna is a delicious place, and I should delight in living there. I shall have a little money when I come of age, I believe—more than enough to furnish our house. Shall we be mediæval or Chippendale? I say Chippendale. And we must get an old house, for the sake of the

paneling and the staircase; and we must pull it all to pieces on account of the drains. And now you must not write to me any more till Edward comes home. I have had a curious letter from him. He is deeply absorbed in unraveling some dreadful mystery. He has not yet found the murderer of that poor girl, but I can see that he no longer suspects *you*. How could he ever have harbored such a thought?"

Cheered by such a letter as this, Bothwell worked as if he had been on the eve of some great examination—worked as if his life depended on these long hours of toil. Yes, he would get a house at Trevenna, the sooner the better. He had felt of late as if the atmosphere of Penmorval stifled him. He had been too long a hanger-on upon his rich cousin. He was angry with himself for having dawdled and procrastinated, and let life slide by him, while he waited as if for a vision from heaven, to point out the road in which he should walk. And now the seraphic vision had been granted to him, but the angel wore the shape of Hilda Heathcote. Hilda had inspired him with the desire to stay in England, to earn his bread in his own country, and out of that wish had arisen this scheme of his. He would lose no time in putting his plan into execution. Of late he had read dislike in the eyes of Julian Wyllard—or it may have been contempt for his idle life, for his dependence. In any case there was that in Wyllard's manner which rendered existence at Penmorval hateful for Bothwell Grahame.

"I suppose he, too, suspects me," Bothwell told himself. "He thinks it quite possible that I flung that girl into the gorge. Society is always ready to impute evil to an idler. There is that old doggerel of Dr. Watts, of the mischief that Satan finds for idle hands to do."

He rode across country to Trevenna the day after he received Hilda's frank and loving letter. He was not going to wait until his darling was able to marry him before beginning his new life. He would start his establishment as soon as the thing could be done, get pupils at once, get over all the roughness, the difficulty of the start before he asked Hilda to share his home. Nor was he going to furnish his house with his wife's money. That was just one of the things that he would not consent to do. He had his idea as to how he should furnish his house, when he found one to his liking.

Of course he was not going to decide upon any house until Hilda had seen it and approved the choice. But in the meantime he rode off to Trevenna on a voyage of discovery.

It was a long ride, and a hilly road, but not too long for the new hunter Glencoe, an animal with a tremendous reserve of force that had to be taken out of him somehow—an accumulated store of kicks and plunges which a clever rider could discount in a good fast trot along the road, or a swinging gallop across the moorland. Bothwell and his horse were on excellent terms by the time they had gone three miles together, although the brute had insisted on walking through Bodmin for the most part on his hind legs.

Life at Penmorval had been just a shade more sober in its hue for the last week. Dora Wyllard had not been able altogether to overcome her offended feeling at that unwarrantable burst of passion upon her husband's part, which had followed Edward Heathcote's

visit. That he should upbraid and insult her, that he should be jealous, he for whose sake she had jilted an upright and honorable man, he to whom she had given all the devotion of her life! It seemed to her an almost unpardonable weakness and littleness on Julian Wyllard's part. And she had thought his character above all pettinesses common to meaner men. She had loved him because he was noble and large-minded.

His indifference to Bothwell's good name, his selfish coldness upon a question which to her was vital, had wounded her to the quick. She was not a woman to give way to sullenness, to shut herself up in the armor of angry pride, to give ungracious answers and scant courtesy to the husband who had offended her. Yet there was a subtle change in her manner and bearing which was perceptible to Julian Wyllard, and which he felt keenly.

Neither husband nor wife had recurred by so much as one word or hint to that scene in the yew-tree arbor. Life had glided by for these last few days in just the same manner as of old, but the shadow was there all the same. The genius of domestic love had veiled his face.

Dora was sitting in the library with her husband at post-time on the day of Bothwell's ride to Trevenna. Mr. Wyllard was at his desk writing, while his wife sat in her favorite window absorbed in a new book, with the open box from Mudie's at her feet, when the servant brought in the post-bag. Mr. Wyllard unlocked it and took out a pile of letters and papers, Dora watching him all the while. He looked up as he was sorting the letters, and surprised that expectant expression of his wife's eyes.

"You are expecting some important letter?" he said, anxiously.

"Yes, I am anxious to hear from Mr. Heathcote," she answered, quietly.

It was the first time that name had been spoken by either of them since the scene in the arbor.

"There is your letter, then, in Heathcote's hand, with the Paris post-mark."

"Thank you. She rose, and walked across to the desk to receive her letters. "I hope he has some good news for me."

She went back to the window and opened her letter, standing by the open window in the full light of the September afternoon, her husband watching her all the while. Her face brightened as she read. There was no need for him to ask if the news were good.

"Your letter seems satisfactory?" he said.

"It is a good letter," she answered. "It tells me that Mr. Heathcote has begun to see how wrong he was in suspecting poor Bothwell. He has evidently made some discovery about that poor girl's fate. He, at any rate, has found out who she is."

"Indeed," said Wyllard, deep in a leading article in the "Times." "He has found out who she is?"

"Yes. He writes her name as if I ought to know all about her. He is still groping in the dark, he says, but he hopes to fathom the mystery of Leonie Lemarque's death."

There was no answer. Mr. Wyllard was absorbed by the paper.

"You were not listening, Julian."

"Oh, yes, I was. Leonie Lemarque—a French name. We were right then in supposing that the girl was French?"

He laid aside the newspaper, and began to open his letters; but he said not a word more about Mr. Heathcote's letter. Dora felt that he might have been more interested—more sympathetic. It was her cousin's reputation and happiness that were at stake. Affection for her should have made these things of greater moment to her husband.

Bothwell came home in time for the eight o'clock dinner, and in excellent spirits. He had seen an old cottage in a large garden, which could be converted, by considerable additions, into a capital house for himself and his pupils. The situation was superb. It stood on a height, near the junction of two roads, and it commanded magnificent views of sea and coast.

"I could make the additions I want for three or four hundred pounds," he told Dora, when he was alone with her in the drawing-room after dinner. "I should be my own architect, and my own builder. I should only have to pay for labor and materials. I did a goodish deal in the building line when I was in the army, you know, Dora, supervising the alterations of the Jungapore barracks. I know more about bricks and mortar than you would give me credit for knowing."

He had previously confided his idea of taking pupils, and Dora had approved, and had promised her heartiest co-operation. He was sure of her sympathy with all his endeavors to win an honorable independence at home. The idea of his emigrating had always been unwelcome to her.

"And now, Dora, I am going to make a very audacious proposition," he said, when he had finished his description of the cottage at Trevenna. "I want you to lend me seven hundred pounds, to be repaid in half-yearly installments during the next three years and a half, with or without interest, as you may think fit."

"Suppose we say nothing about the repayment, Bothwell," said his cousin, smiling at him as she looked up from her embroidery. "You shall have the seven hundred pounds, and we will decide by and by whether it is to be a loan or a gift."

"Dora, you are too generous—" he began.

"Nonsense, Bothwell. I always intended to furnish you with a small capital if you made up your mind to emigrate. I had much rather give you the money to invest at home. You are the last of my clan—my only near relative—and I don't want to lose you. I look to you and Hilda, and your children, to brighten the decline of my life."

"Oh, Dora, that seems a poor substitute for those who should be nearer and dearer," cried Bothwell, and in the next instant would gladly have recalled his words, for he saw the tears well up to his cousin's eyes, and he knew that her childless marriage was a grief.

"You are too good, far more generous than I deserve," he went on hurriedly. "But let the money be at least called a loan. If fortune favor me within the next few years it will be such a pleasure to give you back your money. And if fate prove unkind I shall know I have not a hard creditor. But I have made up my mind that I am going to be very successful. I mean to work as

men seldom work—to make everything I do a labor of love. And with such a wife as Hilda—"

"Hilda will be a wife in a thousand. I am sure your people will adore her. And you must make your house very pretty for Hilda's sake. Seven hundred will not be half enough."

"It will be more than enough. You don't know how economically I can build, and how cleverly Hilda and I will contrive to furnish. We will ride over the country to overhaul all the cottages and farm-houses in quest of neglected old bits of Chippendale and Sherraton. We shall get lovely old things for a mere song, and find some clever jobbing cabinet-maker to make them as good as new—"

"And in the end you will find they will have cost you more than if you had bought them from Nosotti," said Dora, laughing at his eagerness. "I know how costly that kind of economy is apt to prove in the long run. You had better get your Sherraton or your Chippendale furniture made on purpose for you—new and sound and convenient—and of more charming designs than Chippendale ever dreamed of."

"No, Dora. I am intense as a Chippendalist. I must have the real thing—old, and inconvenient even, if you like."

"What a boy you are still, Bothwell. And now I am going to tell you something that will please you."

"Hilda is coming here to-morrow?"

"No. Hilda is not coming back while her brother is away. That is not my good news, Bothwell. It is even better than that."

And then she told him the contents of Heathcote's letter.

"I am very glad," he said quietly. "That is at least one knocked off the list of my suspicious friends."

Julian Wyllard came into the drawing-room while the cousins were sitting together talking, their heads bending toward each other. The family likeness between them was very strong. They looked like brother and sister; and they looked very happy.

Mrs. Wyllard was in the garden next day when the postman brought his bag. She was no longer anxious about her letters, having received the expected tidings from Paris. She was moving slowly about among her roses, armed with a basket and a pair of garden scissors, cutting off blind buds and shabby blooms, making war upon her insect enemies—enjoying the balmy air and warm sunshine of early autumn.

Julian Wyllard came out of the glass door while she was thus occupied. She looked up at the sound of the familiar footsteps, and went across the grass to meet him.

"My dear Dora, are you inclined to go for a week's holiday with me?" he asked in his cheeriest tones.

"I am always ready to go anywhere with you," she answered. "Is it because you have not been feeling well of late that you want to leave Penmorval?" she asked, looking anxiously at him, remembering his strange irritation, that burst of jealousy, which might be after all only the indication of an overworked brain.

"I have not been feeling over-well—a little worried and irritable," he answered, "but it is not on that account I want to go away. You remember my losing the Raphael last July?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, there is a still finer Raphael to be sold next week in Paris, at the Hôtel Drouot. The great Rochejaquelin collection comes to the hammer. There are some of the finest Greuzes in Europe. There are Meissoniers of the highest quality, and a famous Delaroche. I may not buy any of the pictures. No doubt the prices will be enormous. But I should like to see the collection once more before it is scattered to the four winds. Would you mind running over to Paris with me for a week, or would you rather stay at home while I go?"

"I should like very much to go. I have never been in Paris with you, except hurrying through from station to station."

"Have you not? That is strange."

"I have never even seen the house where you lived when you were making your fortune in Paris."

"That would not be much to see. A ground-floor near the Madeleine. A capital point for a business man, within ten minutes' walk of the Bourse, and in that central spot where the idlers and the workers alike congregate. A most uninteresting nest, Dora. Nothing historical, or picturesque, or romantic, within half a mile."

"It will be enough for me that you lived and worked there. You must have worked very hard in those days."

"I was not one of the butterflies, I assure you."

"Mrs. Distin told me that you turned your back upon all the dissipations and pleasures of Paris; that you were a man of one idea, working only for one end—to make a great fortune."

"That is the only way for a poor man to grow rich. I had to make brain-labor and concentration serve me instead of capital. I had the good luck to enter the Parisian Bourse at a period when fortunes might be made by hard thinking—when, to win in the game of speculation, was a question of mathematics. Nature and schooling had made me a decent mathematician, and I used all the science I had in fighting the *coulissiers* with their own weapons; but I am talking a language which you can't understand, Dora. Let the past be past. You and I have only to spend the money I earned in those days."

"You are always spending your wealth for the good of others, Julian," his wife answered, tenderly. "Providence ought to bless the riches you earned in your laborious youth. I can not imagine you caring for money for its own sake."

"I never did so care for it, Dora. Money, in my mind, meant power. I began life as a poor man's son, and tasted all the bitterness of narrow means. In my boyhood I told myself that I would be rich before I grew old, and to that end I worked as few men work. I was able to surround my mother with luxury during the closing years of her life. I was able to give my sister a dowry that helped the man of her choice to make his way in the world years before he could have done so without that aid. No, Dora, I was not a money-grubber; but I made speculation a science, and I turned the age in which I lived to good account. It is not often given to a speculator to live in such a golden age as the period of Morny and Jecker."

"I am sure you would do nothing that was not strictly honorable," said Dora, with her bright, trusting look.

"Oh, I belonged to the honorable section of the Bourse," replied Wyllard, with a somewhat cynical smile. "I had my office in London, and was a power on the Stock Exchange. And when I had acquired a reputation as a financier, I founded the banking firm of Wyllard and Morrison, with one of the richest merchants in London for my partner. A man in my position could soil his fingers with no doubtful enterprise. Well, Dora, it is agreed, you will go to Paris with me?"

"With pleasure."

She was happier than she had felt since that cloud of anger had passed across the domestic horizon. Julian's manner was franker, fonder, more like his old self—the man who had won her away from that other noble-minded man to whom she had promised herself—the man for whose sake she had been content to break her promise.

"Can you be ready to start to-morrow morning? The sale takes place three days hence, and I want to have a good look at the pictures before they come to the hammer."

"Yes, I will be ready whenever you like."

"Then we'll leave by the morning train, and go straight on to Paris by the night mail. You will be able to see Heathcote, and hear how his investigation progresses. Where is he staying, by the way?"

"At the Hôtel de Bade."

"I'll drop him a line and ask him to call on us at the Windsor. It is an old-fashioned family hotel, where I think you will be more comfortable than at one of those huge palaces, where you may be surfeited with splendid upholstery, but rarely get your bell answered under a quarter of an hour. You will take Priscilla, I suppose?"

Priscilla was Mrs. Wyllard's maid, Cornish to the marrow, and a severe Primitive Methodist.

"Priscilla in Paris? No, I think not. She was so wretched in Italy. The very smell of the incense offended her."

"She will not be overpowered by incense in Paris nowadays. She is more likely to be offended by a new Age of Reason. However, if you think you can do without her—"

"I'm sure I can. We shall not be visiting, I suppose?"

"Hardly, I think. It is the dullest of dull seasons in Paris just now, and I had never a large circle of friends in that city. I was much too busy a man to go into society."

"You must have been a stoic to resist the temptations of Parisian society—the writers, the painters, singers, actors—all that is foremost and brightest in the intellectual world."

"There are circles and circles in Paris, as well as in London. I have been in Parisian assemblies that were eminently dull."

They started from Penmorval after breakfast the next morning, and were seated in the Dover mail at eight o'clock, after dining at the Charing Cross Hotel. Dora was in excellent spirits. Change of scene had a brightening effect upon her mind, and she was very happy in the idea of Hilda and Bothwell's happiness. She had handed her cousin a check for seven hundred pounds, with which he was to open an account at the local bank. And then he had

only to wait for Hilda to approve his choice, before he set to work with bricklayers and carpenters at improving a cottage into an Elizabethan Grange. That was his idea.

"We will have an Elizabethan Grange furnished with real Chippendale," he said. "Incongruous, but charming."

"Then be sure that very few of your windows are made to open," said Dora, laughing at his ardor, "if you want to be truly Elizabethan."

"Every casement shall be opened to its uttermost width—every corner of the house shall be steeped with light and air," protested Bothwell.

And now Dora Wyllard was reclining, in her corner of the railway compartment, speeding toward Dover, through the soft autumn night, by Kentish hay-fields and stubble, and across the gentle undulations of a Kentish landscape, so different from the bold hills and deep gorges of her native Cornwall.

There was a reading-lamp hanging on Mrs. Wyllard's side of the carriage, and she had the October Quarterlies, and a heap of papers to beguile the journey. Among the papers was the "Times" supplement, which she opened for the first time to look at the births, deaths, and marriages. Mr. Wyllard had read the other part of the paper before they reached Paddington, but he had not taken the trouble to unfold the supplement.

While Dora was looking down the first column, in a casual way, her eye was suddenly caught by an advertisement at the top of the second column.

"The person who was to have met Leonie Lemarque at Charing Cross Station, on the morning of July 5th last, is earnestly requested to communicate with Messrs. Distin and Son, Solicitors, Furnival's Inn."

"How strange!" exclaimed Mrs. Wyllard, and then she read the advertisement to her husband, who was sitting in an opposite corner, with closed eyes, as if half asleep.

He started at the sound of her voice.

"I beg your pardon, Julian. I did not see that you were asleep."

"I was only dosing. Leonie Lemarque, that is the name of the girl who was killed, was it not? Then, no doubt, the advertisement is put in by Heathcote. The reference to Distin indicates as much."

"He must have made some further discovery about that unfortunate girl," said Dora, thoughtfully. "He must have found out the date of her arrival in London, and that she came to meet some particular person. Do you think it was that person who killed her, Julian?"

"My dear Dora, how can I think about a business of which I know absolutely nothing? For anything I know the girl's death may have been purely accidental, and this person who was to have met her at the station may be a pure creation of Heathcote's brain, and this advertisement only a feeler thrown out in the hope of obtaining information from some unknown source. Why any of you should trouble yourselves to solve this mystery is more than I can understand."

"Why, Julian, did not you yourself send for Mr. Distin—did you not say that as a magistrate it was your duty—"

"To do all I could to further the ends of justice. Most assuredly, Dora. But having invoked the assistance of the cleverest criminal lawyer in the land, and he having failed to fathom the mystery, I had no more to do. I had done my duty; and I was content to let the matter rest."

"So would I have been, if people had not suspected Bothwell. I could have no peace while there was such a cloud upon my cousin's reputation."

"That shows how narrow a view even the cleverest and most large-minded of women can take of this big world. Surely it can matter to no man living what a handful of people in a little country town may choose to think about him."

"Bothwell has to spend his life among those people."

"Well, you have had your own way in the matter, my dear Dora, and if you will only allow me to forget all about it, I am content that you and Heathcote should grope forever in the mystery of that girl's fate. A lady's-maid or a nursery governess, I suppose, who came to England to seek her fortune."

Dora was silent. Once again she felt that there was a want of sympathetic feeling upon her husband's part in this matter. He ought to have remembered that Bothwell was to her as a brother.

They were in Paris early next morning. Mr. Wyllard had telegraphed to the proprietor of the Windsor and had secured charming rooms on the first floor, with a balcony overlooking the gardens of the Tuileries. The palace still stood there, a memorial of the brilliant historic past, and cabs, and carriages, and omnibuses, and wagons were driving across the once sacred grounds, on the new road that had been lately cut from the Rue de Rivoli to the quay. It was a splendid Paris upon which Dora and her husband looked out in the clear freshness of the September morning, but it was curiously changed from that Imperial Paris which Julian Wyllard had known twenty years before. It seemed to him this morning, looking across those ruined palace walls, the daylight streaming through those vacant windows, as if he and the world had grown very old since those days.

Twenty years ago and Morny was alive, and Jecker was a power on the Parisian Bourse, and Julian Wyllard was laying the foundation stones of his fortune. He had started the Credit Mauresque—that powerful association which had dealt with the wealth of Eastern princes and Jewish traders, had ridden gayly over the perilous ocean of public enterprise for some time, and had made great fortunes for the four or five gifted individuals whose second sight revealed to them the right hour at which to withdraw their capital from the company.

Yes, it had been a glorious Paris in those days, a city in which a young Englishman with a mathematical brain could court the goddess Fortune more profitably than in his native capital. Julian Wyllard had earned his bread upon the London Stock Exchange for some years before he changed the scene of his labors to Paris; but it was upon the Paris Bourse that he began to make his fortune.

Dora was tired after her journey, for she had been too full of

thought to sleep in the train, and even now her brain was too active for the possibility of sleep. So, after dressing and breakfasting, she accompanied her husband to the great Parisian sale-rooms to look at the Rochejaquelin collection.

The inspection of the pictures lasted over two hours. Mr. Wyllard was an ardent connoisseur, and his wife sympathized with him in his love of art. Together they criticised the gems of the collection, and stood in silent admiration before the famous Raffaelle.

"It will fetch thousands," said Wyllard.

"Why not buy it, if you really wish to possess it?" said Dora. "Why should we hoard our money? There is no one to come after us. Penmorval may be a show place when you and I are gone, and your picture gallery will give pleasure to hundreds of tourists."

"Ah, there is the rub," sighed her husband, conscious of the latent melancholy in his wife's speech. "No son of mine succeeding, when you and I are gone there will be no one to care for Penmorval—no one to cherish your garden, and say, My mother planted these roses—or planned these walks. No one to treasure the pictures I have collected, for any reason except for their intrinsic value."

"Will you take me to see the house in which you lived and worked?" asked Dora, as they were leaving the auction-room.

"My dear Dora, I can show you the outside of that historic spot," answered her husband, lightly, "but I doubt if I can introduce you to the rooms in which I worked. The present occupant may not be inclined to sympathize with your hero worship."

"Oh, but I should so like to see those rooms, and I am sure if the occupier is a gentleman he will not refuse such a natural request. Here comes Mr. Heathcote," she exclaimed, as they turned into the boulevard.

"I was coming to the Hotel Drouot, in quest of you," said Heathcote, as they shook hands. "I called at your hotel, and was told you had gone to the auction-room. How well you are looking, Mrs. Wyllard—as if Paris agreed with you."

"Your letter took a weight off my mind," she said. "And now I hope you will be kind to Bothwell and Hilda, and not insist upon too long an engagement."

"It seems to me that Bothwell and Hilda have taken their lives into their own hands, and don't want anybody's kindness," he answered; "I have had a tremendous letter from Hilda telling me her lover's plans. They are the most independent young people I ever heard of. And pray what brings you to Paris? Are you going on anywhere?"

"No, we have only come to look at the Rochejaquelin pictures," answered Wyllard. "I have two or three business calls to make in the neighborhood of the Bourse. Wyllard & Morrison have still some dealings in Paris."

"And I am going to look at my husband's old apartments," said Dora. "I have never stayed in Paris since our marriage. My only knowledge of the city dates from the time when I spent a month at Passy with my dear mother. What a happy time it was, and how much we contrived to see. It was in '69, and people were beginning to talk about war with Germany. How little did any of us think

of the ruin that was coming when we saw the Emperor and Empress driving in the Bois."

"Come back to the hotel and lunch with us, Heathcote?" asked Wyllard.

"A thousand thanks, but I am too Parisian to eat at this hour. I breakfasted at eight o'clock."

"And we breakfasted less than three hours ago," said Dora. "I am sure we neither of us want luncheon. Let us go and look at your old home, Julian."

"It is not to be called a home, Dora," answered her husband, with a touch of impatience. "A business man's life has only one aspect, hard work. However, if you want to see the offices in which I made my fortune you shall be gratified. The street is not very far off. Will you walk there with us?" he added, turning to Heathcote.

"Gladly, I am a free man to-day."

"Indeed. Then your criminal investigation, your amateur-detective work is at a standstill for the moment, I conclude," said Wyllard, with something of a sneer.

"For the moment, yes," answered the other, quietly.

"And you have made some startling discoveries, no doubt, since you crossed the Channel?"

"Yes, my discoveries have been startling, but as they relate to the remote past rather than to the period of that poor girl's death they are of no particular value at present."

"The remote past? What do you mean by that?' asked Wyllard.

"Ten years ago."

"May we ask the nature of these discoveries?"

"I'd rather tell you nothing at present. My knowledge is altogether fragmentary. Directly I have reduced it to a definite form—directly I have a clear and consecutive story to tell—you and Mrs. Wyllard shall hear that story. In the meantime, I had rather not talk about the case."

"I see. You have all the professional reticence. And I see that you and Distin are working together," said Wyllard.

"How do you mean?"

"We saw your advertisement in yesterday's 'Times.'"

"How did you know that I had inserted that advertisement?"

"The girl's name was conclusive—Leonie Lemarque—that was the name of the girl who was killed."

"Yes. But I did not think it was known to anyone except Distin and myself."

"You mentioned the name in your letter to me," said Dora.

"Did I really? Then it was unconsciously. I meant to have told nothing till I could tell the whole story."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOME OF THE PAST.

THEY walked on to the Madeleine, and to a quiet street near the Madeleine, one of the older streets of Paris—a street of offices and wholesale traders.

The house in which Mr. Wyllard had occupied the ground floor was one of the best in the street, a large stone-fronted house, with a high doorway and carved columns—not as richly decorated as those palatial dwellings of Hausmannized Paris, but a handsome and somewhat florid style of house notwithstanding. It stood at the corner of a narrow court, leading no one cared where. Doubtless to some obscure back slum in which the working classes had one of their nooks—those hidden colonies which lurk here and there behind the palaces of all great cities.

The ground floor was no longer the home of finance and grave transactions. The house in which Julian Wyllard had schemed and labored was now occupied by a wholesale dealer in foreign goods of all kinds—from china to toys, from traveling bags to tea trays, chinoiseries, unbreakable glass, German lamps, English electro-plate. The house had become one huge bazaar, which a stranger might enter without much ceremony; albeit there is a strict etiquette in such establishments, and no retail purchases were permissible. Only the trade was allowed to buy anything in that dazzling chaos of small wares.

While all the upper floors had been made into warehouses, the lower floor had been in some wise respected. The rooms in which Julian Wyllard had worked were used as offices by the Messrs. Blumenlein, while one of the brothers had made his nest in Julian's old rooms at the back of the offices.

"Upon my word, Dora," said Mr. Wyllard, pausing on the thershold of his old abode, "I feel that we are going into this house on a fool's errand. I don't know what excuse to make."

"Why make any excuse at all?" repiied his wife. "Leave the whole business to me, Julian. I want to see your old home, and I am determined I will see it. I am not at all afraid of Messrs. Blumenlein."

"In that case I will leave you and Heathcote to manage the matter between you," said Wyllard, with a sudden touch of impatience, of anger even, his wife thought. "I have a business call to make near here. Mr. Heathcote will take you back to your hotel."

He turned on his heel, and was gone, before Dora could make any objection. Again she had seen that dark look in his face which had so startled and shocked her in the yew-tree arbor. Was it indeed jealousy of her old lover which so changed him? Her pride revolted at the idea of such want of faith in one to whom she had given so much.

She allowed no sign of disquietude to escape her, but went quietly into the office of Messrs. Blumenlein, followed by Mr. Heathcote.

"Pardon me for intruding upon you, gentlemen," she said in French to the two clerks who were seated at a desk in this outer room. "These offices were some years ago occupied by my husband, and I should esteem it a favor if you would allow me to see the rooms on this floor."

A gentlemanly-looking man who was standing near a window looking over some papers, looked up at the sound of her voice, and came over to her.

"With pleasure, madame," he said. "Have I the honor of speaking to Mrs. Wyllard?"

"Yes, monsieur, I am Mrs. Wyllard. You were my husband's immediate successor in these rooms, I conclude?"

"Yes, madame, there was no other occupant. My brother and I bought this house in '71, almost immediately after the war; but Mr. Wyllard was the occupant of this floor for some years after we were in possession."

"Exactly two years," said a second Mr. Blumenlein, appearing from an inner room. "Is it possible that madame has not before seen these rooms in which her distinguished husband transacted so much important business?"

"No, monsieur, this is my first visit to Paris since my marriage. I am much interested in seeing these rooms."

"It will be an honor and a pleasure to us to show them," said the elder of the two brothers. "Gustav, there, my younger brother, enjoys the possession of the private apartments almost exactly as Mr. Wyllard left them. He bought the furniture and fittings, pictures, bronzes, everything except the books, *en bloc*, when Mr. Wyllard gave up his Parisian establishment. Hardly anything has been altered. These offices can have little interest for you, madame. They are the *fac-simile* of a thousand other Parisian offices. But the private apartments have a certain individuality. Gustav, show madame the rooms which were once her husband's home."

There was a touch of German sentimentality about Mr. Blumenlein, in spite of his Parisian training. He was full of sympathy for the affectionate wife. He had lofty ideas about the sanctity of home.

The younger brother, Gustav, opened a padded door, and admitted the two visitors into his bachelor's nest.

The first room which they entered was the library, lined from floor to ceiling with book-shelves, and lighted by a large skylight. It was a room that had been built out into a yard. It was furnished with carved oak, in the Henri Deux style—rich, antique, solid. The clock upon the chimney-piece was a gem of old metal work. The covers of chairs and sofas were of old tapestry, somber, genuine, artistic.

Adjoining this were the *salon* and dining-room in one, plainly furnished in the modern style. The walls were decorated with etchings of the most famous French pictures of the Second Empire. It was a small room; an almost severe simplicity was its chief characteristic. Nothing here assuredly of the sybarite or the voluptuary, thought Edward Heathcote, as he contemplated the home of his rival's solitary manhood.

Bedroom and bathroom completed the suite of apartments, and even to these Mrs. Wyllard and her companion were admitted.

The bedroom was spacious, lofty, handsomely furnished in a solid and somber style. But it was not a cheerful room. It was situated at the back of the house, and its windows, deeply recessed and heavily mullioned, derived their light from a narrow court. The lower part of each window was of ground-glass; the upper sashes were of violet-tinted glass, and gave an artificial color to the

daylight. The curtains were of dark brown damask, the heavy arm-chairs and sofa were upholstered in dark brown velvet.

By the fire-place there was the *secretaire* at which Julian Wyllard had worked, the large shaded lamp which had lighted his evening toil. Mr. Blumenlein showed these things with pride. Nothing had been altered.

"I am a man of somewhat studious habits, like Mr. Wyllard," he said, "and I often work late into the night. This room is a delightful room, for none of the noises of Paris penetrate here. The court is very little used after dark—a passing footstep perhaps once in half an hour. It is an almost monastic repose."

The bed was in an alcove in a corner, entirely shrouded by brown damask curtains like those which draped the tall narrow windows.

"There is a door leading into the court, I see," said Heathcote, whose keen eyes had scrutinized every feature of the room."

"What, you have perceived that?" exclaimed Mr. Blumenlein, with marked surprise. "I thought it was quite hidden by the curtains."

"No, the top of the upper hinge is just visible above the curtain rod."

"Strange, no one ever before noticed that door."

"It is not a secret door, I suppose," said Heathcote.

"Certainly not. But it has never been used in my time, and I doubt if Mr. Wyllard ever used it," said Mr. Blumenlein, drawing back the curtain. "The bed stood in his time just where it stands now, with the head against the door."

"The bedstead is light enough to be moved easily if the door were wanted," suggested Heathcote.

It was a small brass bedstead of English make. The voluminous curtains made a kind of tent, independent of the bedstead.

"No doubt it could," replied Blumenlein, "but I fancy it could have been no more wanted in Mr. Wyllard's time than it has been in mine. I believe it must have been made by some former inhabitant of these rooms, who wanted free egress and ingress at any hour of the night, without exciting the curiosity of the porter."

"You conclude, then, that the door was an after-thought," said Heathcote, "and not in the original plan of the house."

"Decidedly. You will see how ruthlessly it has been cut through dado and moldings—an after-thought evidently."

Mr. Blumenlein pulled aside the bedstead and showed Mr. Heathcote the door. It was a low narrow door, of plain oak, without paneling or ornamentation of any kind. The fastening was a latch-lock, and a strong bolt secured the door on the inner side.

"A convenient door, no doubt," said Heathcote, "for a person of secret habits."

Dora looked lingeringly round the room. Its gloom oppressed her. The opaque windows, the tinted light from the upper sashes, the somber coloring, the heavy furniture—all contributed to that gloomy effect. The only spot of brightness in the room was the writing-table, with its brass fittings, its handsome brass lamp, and large green shade. There her husband sat night after night, when the rest of Paris was gyrating in the whirlpool of fashionable pleasure, light as withered leaves dancing in the wind. There he had

sat brooding, calculating, plotting, in the race for wealth. It was for money he had toiled, and to make a great fortune—not for science, or art, or fame—not to be useful or great—only to be rich. It seemed a sordid life to look back upon—a wasted life even—and Dora Wyllard thought regretfully of those long evenings spent in this gloomy room. The idea of that monastic life had no charm for her. She would rather have heard that her husband had been the light of an intellectual circle—the favorite of fashion even. The picture of these studious nights spent in brooding over the figures in a share list, the pages of a bank book, chilled her soul.

And yet, in the maturity of his days, her husband had seemed to her the most generous and high-minded of men, setting but little value upon his wealth, caring nothing for money in the abstract.

"At the least he has known how to use his fortune nobly," she told herself, as she turned to leave that gloomy bed-chamber. "I, who was born with good means, can hardly understand the eagerness of a poor young man to win fortune. It is a foolish idea of mine, after all, that there is anything ignoble in working for riches."

"Well, Mrs. Wyllard, has your hero-worship been satisfied? Have you seen enough of the temple which once enshrined your god?" said Heathcote lightly.

"Yes, I have been very much gratified; and I must thank Mr. Blumenlein for his extreme courtesy."

The merchant protested that he had rarely enjoyed so great a privilege as that which Mrs. Wyllard had afforded him, and with exchange of courtesies they parted on the threshold of the outer office.

Mr. Heathcote and Mrs. Wyllard walked to the hotel together. It was not a long walk, and it took them only by crowded streets and busy thoroughfares, where anything like earnest conversation was impossible. And yet Edward Heathcote could but remember that it was the first time they two had walked together since Dora had been his plighted wife. Ah, how cruel a pang it gave him to recall those old days, and to remember all she had been to him, all she might have been, had fate used him more kindly.

He stole a look at the beautiful face as they walked slowly across the Place Vendôme. Yes, she was no less lovely than of old; her beauty had ripened; not changed. There was a more thoughtful look, there were traces even of care and sorrow, but those indications only heightened the spirituality of her face.

Oh, what worship, what devotion he could have given her now in the bloom of her womanhood, in the maturity of his manhood—such whole-hearted, thoughtful love as youth can never give. And it was not to be. They were to be apart forever, they two. They were to be strangers; since this assumption of friendship, to which he had tried to reconcile himself, was after all but a mockery. Chivalrous feeling might keep his thoughts pure, his honor unspotted; but in his heart of hearts he loved his first love as passionately as in the days of his youth.

And to-day, for the first time, he had heard her husband address her coldly and curtly, with a touch of anger even.

He was not likely to forget that curt, impatient tone, and the frown that had accentuated it.

"I was very glad to get your letter," she said, presently. "Tell me once more with your own lips that you have ceased to suspect my cousin."

"Ceased to suspect would perhaps be too strong an expression. But in the discoveries I have made relating to that murdered girl there is certainly nothing that in any way points to Mr. Grahame."

"I wish you would tell me all you have discovered—how near you are to clearing up the mystery."

"I fear I am still very far from that. It is the history of a remote crime which occupies me at present, and I hope in that history of the past to find the clew to poor Leonie's death. I shall know more in a few days."

"How so?"

"You saw my advertisement in the 'Times.' If that advertisement be not answered within a week I shall conclude that the man who was to have met Leonie Lemarque on the morning of July 5th has some part in the guilt of her death."

"And then—"

"And then it will be my business, or Mr. Distin's business, to find that man."

They were at the door of the hotel by this time, and here Mr. Heathcote bade Dora adieu.

"We shall meet again before you leave Paris, I dare say," he said. "If Wyllard wants me, he will know where to find me."

"You are not going home yet?"

"No; I am likely to stay here some little time."

"And poor Hilda is longing to have you back at the Spaniards. She will not see Bothwell while you are away. She is bound by the promise you exacted from her. Their future home—everything is in abeyance till you return," pleaded Dora.

"The home must remain in abeyance a little longer. It is hard, no doubt; but when I go back I may be able to give Bothwell some substantial help in the matter of that future home."

"He will need only your sympathy and your advice. He can manage everything else for himself."

"I see; he has been helped already."

"Bothwell has always been to me as a brother, and he can never be poor while I am rich," answered Dora, as they shook hands.

Heathcote walked slowly back to the boulevard, thinking over this unexpected arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Wyllard in Paris. Why had they come? That alleged reason of the picture-sale seemed rather more like an excuse for a journey than a motive. True that Mr. Wyllard had been known to go up to London on purpose to attend a sale at Christie and Manson's; and there might, therefore, be nothing extraordinary in his going still further on the same errand. But it was strange that the picture-sale should coincide with Heathcote's presence in Paris. Could it be Dora's eagerness to know the result of his researches that had brought her and her husband to the Hotel Windsor? Was her impatience the motive of the visit?

Hardly, he thought, for he knew the candor of her nature; and he told himself that she would not have misrepresented the reason of her journey. She had told him that the visit was a sudden whim of her husband's, arising out of his passion for art.

Could it be that Julian Wyllard was so deeply interested in the question of Bothwell's guilt or innocence as to make an excuse for being on the scene of the investigation. He had seemed indifferent almost to unkindness. He had wounded his wife's feelings by his coldness upon this question. And now it seemed to Edward Heathcote that his real motive in coming across the Channel must be to watch the case with his own eyes. His manner to-day when he inquired about Heathcote's progress had been seemingly careless; but beneath that apparent indifference the lawyer had noted a keen expectancy—an intent watchfulness. Yes, it was something of deeper moment than a picture-sale which had brought Julian Wyllard to Paris, post-haste, at a day's notice. His angry manner to his wife an hour ago had indicated nervous irritation—a mind on the rack.

Yet, looking at the question from a worldly point of view—and Heathcote considered Julian essentially a man of the world—there seemed but little reason why he should be deeply concerned as to whether Bothwell was or was not suspected of foul play in the matter of the French girl's death. The evidence against the young man was of far too slight and vague a character to endanger his life or liberty. It was only enough to cast a cloud upon his reputation, and that his cousin's husband should put himself out of the way on this account, seemed to the last degree unlikely. Julian Wyllard's life, judged as Heathcote judged it, was that of a man who had lived always for himself and his own happiness. An excellent husband to a wife whom he adored, a good master, a liberal landlord; yet a man with whom self had ever been paramount.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FACE FROM THE GRAVE.

A WEEK passed. Mr. Wyllard attended the sale at the Hotel Drouot, bought three of the smaller gems of the Rochejaquelin gallery, and allowed the Raffaelle to pass into a national collection. His wife and he had gone about Paris and its environs in the meanwhile; Dora was very happy in revisiting the spots she had admired in her youth.

The week had gone, and there had been no reply to Heathcote's advertisement. But there had been a letter from George Distin.

"The last few days have not been entirely barren in results," he wrote. "Leonie Lemarque's hand-bag has been found at the Charing Cross Station; it was left in the cloak-room on the morning of the 5th of July, immediately after the arrival of the mail train from Dover. The bag is now in my office. It contains some linen marked 'L. Lemarque,' slippers, brush, and comb; but not a document of any kind—nothing to afford the slightest clew as to the girl's business in London. The police have found a hansom cabman who drove a tall, gentlemanlike man and a French girl from Charing Cross to Paddington Station on the morning of the 5th of July, in time for the Penzance train. They had no luggage. The cabman believes that he should recognize the man if he saw him again, but can give no clear description of his appearance, except that he was

a handsome-looking man in the prime of life. He talked French to the girl, and the cabman supposes him to have been a Frenchman. He and the girl appeared to be on very good terms. The cabman saw them go into the Paddington Station together, about five minutes before the starting of the train. The photograph of the dead girl has been shown to this cabman, and he has identified it as the likeness of the little French girl he drove in his cab."

This was all the progress that Mr. Distin's agents had made at present. The facts looked dark against the man who had taken Leonie Lemaique from station to station. If he had been innocent of all wrong in relation to that helpless stranger, surely he would have replied to the advertisement; he would have come forward to say what part he had taken in the history of Leonie Lemarque.

Mr. Heathcote stopped the first advertisement, and inserted a second worded thus:

"MONSIEUR GEORGES, who resided in Paris in the year '71, and for some years previously, or any friend of Monsieur Georges, now residing in England, is earnestly requested to communicate with Messrs. Distin and Son, solicitors, Furnival's Inn."

He had not much hope of getting a reply to this advertisement, after the failure of the previous appeal, but he thought it was well to advertise this name of Georges. Some insignificant person, some busybody who had known the man Georges at some period of his existence might reply, and any information so obtained might be a link in the chain of that strange story of Marie Prévol and her mysterious lover.

Mysterious Heathcote felt this man to have been, despite Trottier's idea that he was only a rich American who lived a Bohemian life as a matter of choice. It seemed to Heathcote as if there must have been some stronger ground than mere whim for an existence so secluded, so exceptional, spent in such a city as Paris, where the delight of the rich and the idle is to spend their days and nights before the eyes of an admiring crowd, and to have every movement and every caprice recorded in the newspapers.

And this man had been in the prime of his manhood, good-looking, clever, spiritual, the lover of a beautiful actress. Hardly the kind of person to hide his light under a bushel, unless there was some strong reason for concealment.

What could that reason be, Heathcote wondered, as he brooded over the imperfect story of Marie Prévol and her niece. Was this Georges a swindler who had come by his wealth in a criminal manner, and dared not show himself in the light of day? Was he one of the many tricksters and schemers of Paris, the birds of prey who live upon carrion, and who know themselves the scorn of their fellow-men? Or had he a wife from whose jealous eye he was obliged to hide his devotion to Marie Prévol. Heathcote believed that there must have been some guilty reason for the life which shrunk from the light of day.

He had been in Paris a fortnight, and he began to ask himself how long this investigation to which he had pledged himself was likely to last. At the beginning his progress had seemed rapid—

triumphant almost. Starting from utter ignorance of the name and position of the dead girl, he had arrived in a few days at an exact knowledge of her name, surroundings, and past history. Yet he was constrained to confess to himself that, armed with all these facts, he was yet not one whit nearer to finding the man who had murdered her. Given this history of Leonie Lemarque's childhood and youth, it was still possible that Bothwell Grahame had thrown her out of the railway carriage.

The man who took her in a hansom from Charing Cross to Paddington might have left her at the latter station. She might have gone alone upon her way toward Penzance, to encounter a villain on the road, and that villain might have been Bothwell Grahame. The thing was within the limits of possibility, though in Heathcote's present mood it seemed to him altogether unlikely. Yet firmly to establish the fact of Bothwell's innocence, he must find the man who was guilty.

It seemed to him that the man who met Leonie Lemarque at the station, who was known to have conducted her to another station, had in a measure condemned himself by his silence. If he had not had some guilty secret he would assuredly have replied to the advertisement. He would have been apprised by that advertisement that some evil had befallen Leonie Lemarque, and he would have been prompt to come forward and tell all he knew of the girl who had come to him for aid, a friendless orphan, a stranger in a strange land.

It seemed clear to Heathcote that Georges, the murderer, was still living, still in dread of the gallows; and that the girl who went to meet the friend of the murderer had fallen into a trap. The papers she carried were doubtless of a compromising character, the girl herself was the sole witness of the crime, the only living being who could recognize the murderer. Papers and witness had disappeared together.

Heathcote was fond of Paris. It was not irksome to him to stay there, even in the dead season. He had the theaters for his evening amusement; he had two or three friends who had not fled to the mountain or the sea, and in whose drawing-rooms he was welcome. He had the National Library in the Rue Richelieu for his club; and he had the ever-varying life of the Boulevard for his recreation. Time, therefore, did not hang heavily on his hands; and he knew that while he watched and waited in Paris, George Distin would not be idle in London. Every clew, were it the slightest, would be patiently followed by that expert investigator.

In his saunterings in the Rue di Rivoli and on the boulevards, Mr. Heathcote had hunted assiduously for a photograph of Marie Prévol; but—so fleeting is the fame of beauty which leaves nothing behind it save a tender memory—that for some time he had failed utterly in his quest. Her name was hardly remembered by the people who sold photographs. And yet twelve or thirteen years ago the portrait of Marie Prévol was in every shop window. It had been sold by thousands, had adorned every album in Paris, and had been hung over many a bachelor's mantel-piece, worshiped by half the beardless boys in France and Belgium.

At last Mr. Heathcote lighted upon an elderly shopman, who was

a little more intelligent, and had a much better memory, than the men he had encountered hitherto. The man perfectly remembered Marie Prévol and her photographs.

"We had a photograph of her by Nadar," he said, "a portrait that was the rage. It was soon after her first appearance at the Porte Saint Martin, and it was the costume in which she made her *début*. She was the Genius of Evil, in a black satin bodice and a black *tulle* skirt starred with gold. The close-fitting black bodice set off her graceful figure, and her superb shoulders, and her hair, which was positively magnificent, fell down her back in a horse's tail. It was like a stream of gold. I saw her in that character half a dozen times. All Paris rushed to see her, though she was never much of an actress. But her beauty made her famous all over Europe. We used to send her photographs to St. Petersburg. But there is a fashion in these things, and I dare say almost every one of those photographs has found its way to the rubbish heap. If you call to-morrow I may be able to supply you with what you want; but I shall have to hunt over a good deal of our old stock to get at it."

"I shall be beholden to you if you will do so," answered Heathcote. "I suppose Mademoiselle Prévol had the weakness of our lovely ladies in England, and was fond of having herself photographed."

"In the first year or so, when she began to be celebrated for her beauty, there were a good many different photographs of her—in this costume, and in that—and, you know, in those fairy spectacles, every handsome actress wears at least half a dozen costumes. But, after that first year, there were no more of Mademoiselle Prévol's photographs to be had, for love or money. Our firm applied to her, offered her a liberal royalty, five sous upon every photograph, if she would sit to Nadar in all her costumes, and give us the sole privilege of selling her portraits. But she declined. She was never going to sit again. She did not want herself vulgarized by having her portrait sold for a franc to every *calicot* in France. Our firm felt themselves offended by her reply, which was given to one of our principals, through an impertinent seamstress, who worked by the day for Mademoiselle Prévol, and who almost shut the door on our principal's nose. Our firm took the trouble to find out why mademoiselle objected to the fame which photography can alone bestow upon beauty: and we discovered that there was a lover in the case, a mysterious lover—a man who kept himself curiously dark—"

"Stay," exclaimed Heathcote. "I will give a thousand francs for a photograph of that lover."

The shopman shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

"A liberal offer, monsieur, and a very safe one. Except that the man's name was Georges, I know nothing about him. The police would have given me twice as much as you offer for his photograph, if I could have furnished them with one ten years ago, immediately after the murder of Marie Prévol."

And then the man proceeded to relate the story of the actress's death, and the impression which it made in Paris at the time. Mr. Heathcote listened, and affected ignorance; for, even in these rec-

ollections, there might be some detail to suggest a clew. There was nothing, however. The man told the story as it had been told in the papers, and as it was already known to Heathcote.

He went back to the shop on the following day, and the shopman showed him three different photographs of Marie Prévol.

Two were of the *carte de visite* size, in costume. They had both grown pale with age, and had an old-fashioned look. They were full-length portraits, showing the perfection of an exquisite figure, as displayed in the scanty drapery of a burlesque costume, a graceful girlish form, delicately fashioned, a perfect face, small, refined features, a head crowned with masses of plaited hair. But, in these small photographs, the soul was wanting. Beyond the one fact, that the original was exquisitely lovely, they revealed nothing.

The third was of cabinet size, and here the woman herself appeared. Here, in the face of the photograph, Edward Heathcote looked back across ten years, and saw the face of the living woman, the smile on the lips, the light in the eyes. It was a head vignetted, the head only, carelessly draped with a cloud of tulle, which half veiled the rich masses of hair. It was an exquisite face, eyes large and dark and dreamy, shadowed by long dark lashes, an expression of pensive tenderness about the perfect lips, the nose small and straight, the chin delicately molded. It was not the bold bright beauty of an actress accustomed to challenge the admiration of the vulgar crowd; it was a beauty instinct with tender, womanly feeling and serious thought, an essentially feminine loveliness, and its chief characteristic was purity. It would have been impossible to associate such loveliness with an evil life, a dissolute mind.

The color of this larger photograph was almost as good as if it had been taken yesterday; the portrait had a living look which struck Heathcote painfully. It was sad to think that lovely face had been lying in the dust for years—that the sweet smile in those eyes was nothing more than a memory. He was to dine at the Windsor that evening. Julian Wyllard talked of leaving Paris next morning. He wanted to take his wife on to Switzerland, perhaps to the Italian lakes. Dora was pleased at the idea of revisiting the scenes in which her honeymoon had been spent. They seemed far away in a dim past those days of early married life, when all the world was decked in the vivid hues of hope and gladness. Her union with Julian Wyllard had been a happy one, but there had been something wanting. There had been the little rift within the lute. That lonely old house at Penmorval chilled her sometimes, with its silent corridors, its empty rooms. It would have been so sweet to her to hear baby feet pattering along those corridors—baby voices—that glad childish treble which is like the piping of young birds, in those spacious rooms. There were so many rooms, there was so much vacant space in the old house which only children could have filled. And now she told herself that the dream was past and done with. She felt as if she were growing old, and that somehow, she knew not how, she and her husband were further apart than they had been. It might be that the disappointment of a childless union was preying upon his mind—the burden of a great fortune for which he had toiled overmuch in his youth, renouncing every social pleasure, friendship,

love, all things only to heap up wealth for which there should be no heir.

The dinner at the Windsor was bright and pleasant, albeit Heathcote was the only guest. Julian Wyllard was in excellent spirits, full of plans for making the most of the bright weather in Switzerland. Dora was pleased at his gayety. She had been going about a good deal with him, revisiting all the places she had seen with her mother—the churches, the galleries, the law-courts, that brand-new Palais de Justice, so splendid, so imposing, so uninteresting. They had been to Versailles.

"Did you go to Saint Germain?" asked Heathcote. "There is not much to see in the château where poor old James Stuart shed the light of exiled royalty; but the old town, and the terrace, and the forest are delightful."

"No; we did not go to Saint Germain. We had arranged to go yesterday, but Julian mistook the time at which the train started, and we reached the station too late for the only train that would have suited us."

"You have never been to Saint Germain?" asked Heathcote.

"Oh, yes, I was there with my mother years ago," answered Dora. "We stayed at the Henri Quatre for a week. I have ridden and rambled all over the forest. I was charmed with the place. I should like to have gone there again with Julian."

"There may be time when we return from Switzerland," said her husband.

"Why not delay your journey for a day, and let us all go to Saint Germain to-morrow?" said Heathcote. "Suppose you dine with me at the Henri Quatre. I have a morbid interest in that hotel, and in the forest."

"Indeed! But why?" asked Dora.

Instead of any verbal answer, Heathcote took from his pocket the photograph of Marie Prévol and handed it to Mrs. Wyllard. She and her husband looked at it together. She had drawn closer to him after dinner, as they sat at the small round table, and now they were sitting side by side, like lovers.

There was a silence as they looked at the portrait.

"What an exquisite face," exclaimed Dora, at last. "I don't think I ever saw lovelier eyes or a sweeter expression. Who is the original? Do you know her?"

"She has been dead ten years. I never saw her," answered Heathcote, gravely.

"But what has this portrait to do with your morbid interest in the forest of Saint Germain?" asked Dora.

"It is the likeness of a woman who was cruelly murdered there just ten years ago. She was an actress known as Marie Prévol. The murder made a great sensation at the time. You must have heard of it, Mr. Wyllard, for I think you were a resident in Paris in '71?"

"I was a resident in Paris till '73. Yes, I perfectly remember the murder of Marie Prévol and her admirer. But it was one of those crimes which do not excite any deep or lasting interest. The case was too common, the motive too obvious. An outbreak of jealous fury on the part of a jilted lover. Had the murderer and his vic-

tims belonged to the working classes society would scarcely have heard of the crime, certainly would have taken no notice of it. But because she was an actress and her admirer a man of fashion there was a fuss."

"Then you do not consider such a murder interesting?" asked Heathcote.

"Assuredly not," replied Wyllard. "To be interesting, a murder must be mysterious. Here there was no mystery."

"Pardon me. I think you must have forgotten the details of the story. There was a mystery, and a profound one; but that mystery was the character of the man Georges, who was known to have been Marie Prévol's devoted lover, and who was, by some, supposed to have been her husband."

"Ah, yes, I remember," answered Wyllard. "These things come back to one's mind as one discusses them. Georges was the name of the supposed murderer. He got off so cleverly as to baffle the keenest police in Europe."

"Did you know anything of him?"

"Nothing. He was a nobody, I believe. A man of ample means, but of no social standing."

"His life was a social mystery, and it is in that mysterious existence that I find an interest surpassing anything I have hitherto met with in the history of crime."

"Really," exclaimed Julian Wyllard, with something of a sneer in his tone. "I perceive you have begun the business of amateur detective on a large scale. I understood from Dora that you were coming to Paris solely with a view to finding out anything there was to be discovered about that poor little girl who tumbled off the viaduct, and whom, I think, you call Leonie Lemarque."

"Leonie Lemarque. That was the girl's name. Leonie Lemarque's death is only the last link in a chain of events beginning with the murder of Marie Prévol."

Julian Wyllard started impatiently from his chair.

"My dear Heathcote, I thought you the most sensible man I ever met, but really this sounds like rank lunacy. What in Heaven's name can the murder at Saint Germain ten years ago have to do with the death of that girl the other day?"

"Only this much. Leonie Lemarque was Marie Prévol's niece, and I have the strongest reason for believing that she went to London to meet the murderer of her aunt."

CHAPTER XVII.

STRUCK DOWN.

As Edward Heathcote uttered those words the conviction of their truth flashed into his mind. In thoughtful days and watchful nights this question as to the identity of the person who was to meet Leonie Lemarque at the railway station had been a perplexity to him, the subject of many a new theory; and now it came upon him all at once that this thing which he had said on the spur of the moment, in the heat of argument, was the true solution of the mystery.

It was to Georges himself, her daughter's generous, adoring lover, her daughter's suspected murderer, that Mme. Lemarque had sent her granddaughter, as to one who of all other men would be most likely to act generously to the orphan girl, were it only in remorse for his crime.

He tried to realize the thoughts of the lonely old woman, dying in penury, leaving her orphan grandchild to face the world without a friend. She would go over the list of those whom she had known in the past, those who were rich enough to be generous. Alas! how few there are who remain the friends of poverty. One man she had known of, although she had never seen him, rich, generous to lavishness. He had been suspected, by herself as well as by the world, as guilty of her daughter's death. But it might be that she had afterward modified her opinion, that she had received some communication from this Georges, that he had induced her to believe in his innocence, that he had sent her money, had helped her to struggle on against adverse times, had helped her for a while, and then grown weary And she, knowing the place of his exile, had, in her desperation, determined upon committing her grandchild to his care, rather than to the pitiless world of strange faces and careless hearts, the outside world to which one helpless girl the more is but as one drop in the ocean of sorrowing humanity. She had sent Leonie Lermarque to meet this man, and the girl had recognized the murderer of her aunt.

And yet this could hardly be, since the cabman's evidence showed that Leonie had been on the best possible terms with the man with whom she drove to Paddington Station.

After that speech of his, Edward Heathcote had no longer the power to withhold any details of his investigation from Julian Wyllard and his wife. He told them in fewest words all that had happened since he crossed the Channel.

Dora was intensely interested in the story. The passionate love and passionate jealousy were very human feelings that appealed to her womanly tenderness. She could not withhold her pity from the murderer.

"Strange, that in all your Parisian experience you never met this Monsieur Georges," she said to her husband.

"Hardly, since I went out very little; while this man was evidently a rank Bohemian, who only began to live after midnight," answered Wyllard, carelessly.

He was sitting in a thoughtful attitude, his elbow on the table, his chin leaning on his hand, and that photograph of Marie Prévol lying before him.

He was looking intently at it, perusing every lineament.

Presently he looked up, slowly, thoughtfully, from the photograph to the face of his wife.

"Yes," said Heathcote. "I know what you are thinking. There is a likeness. It struck me this evening directly I came into this room. There is a curious likeness between the face of the living and the dead."

That morning, on studying the countenance in the photograph, Edward Heathcote had been perplexed, worried even by a sense of familiarity in the face of the dead. It smiled at him as a face he

had known of old, a face out of the past. Yet it was only in the evening when he came into the *salon* at the Windsor, and Mrs. Wyllard came to meet him in the lamplight, that he knew what the likeness meant. It was not an obvious or striking likeness. The resemblance was rather in expression than in feature, but one face recalled the other.

"Yes, there is a likeness," said Wyllard, coldly, passing the photograph back to its owner, who rose to take leave just as the clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven.

"I shall look in to-morrow and see if you are inclined for an afternoon at St. Germain," he said, as he shook hands with Dora.

"You are very kind," she said, "but your invitation is no longer tempting. You have spoiled my interest in that sweet old place. I shall always think of it as the scene of Marie Prévol's death."

"But surely that is an additional charm," said Wyllard, mockingly. "If you are gifted with Mr. Heathcote's detective temper, the genius of the heaven-born police-officer, Saint Germain will be all the more interesting to you on account of a double murder—and perhaps a suicide into the bargain—for it is as likely as not the murderer's bones are moldering in some gravel-pit."

"You forget my story of the traveling cap," said Heathcote.

"That was a shrewd hypothesis on your ex-police-officer's part, but it is by no means conclusive evidence," answered Wyllard.

Heathcote called at the Windsor upon the following afternoon to inquire if Mr. and Mrs. Wyllard had left for Switzerland. He was shocked to hear that Mr. Wyllard had been taken seriously ill in the night, and that there had been two medical men with him that morning. Madame was terrible distressed, the waiter told him, but she bore up admirably.

Heathcote sent in his name, and was at once admitted to the *salon*, where Dora came to him after the briefest delay.

She was very pale, and there were signs of terror and of grief in her countenance.

"I am glad you have come," she faltered. "I should have sent for you—only—" she hesitated, and stopped, with tears in her eyes, feeling that in another moment she might have said too much. He was her oldest friend, the man to whom her thoughts turned naturally in the hour of trouble, the man whom of all others she most trusted; but he was her old lover also, and she felt that never again could she dare to appeal to his friendship as she had done for Bothwell's sake.

"Is there anything very serious?" he asked.

"Yes, it is very serious. Paralysis. Only a slight attack the doctors say, and one from which my poor Julian may soon recover. But there are signs of a physical decay which may end fatally—an overworked brain, the English physician says. And yet his life has been so easy, so placid, for the last seven years."

"No doubt, but his life in this city was a life of excitement and anxiety, the fever of the race for wealth. He is suffering now, most likely, for the high-pressure of that period. Is his mind affected by the shock?"

"Not in the least. His mind was never clearer than it has been to-day."

"When did the illness begin?"

"Early this morning, five hours after you left us. We sat up till nearly one o'clock, talking of our trip to Switzerland and Italy. Julian was in wonderful spirits. I have never known him more cheerful. He planned a tour that would last all through the winter, as I told him. It was one o'clock when I went to bed, and I left him sitting in his dressing-room reading. The door was half open, and I could see him as he sat by the table in the bright light of the lamp. I had slept for hours, as it seemed to me, when I was awakened by hearing my name called in a strange voice. I sprung out of bed frightened by that unknown voice, and then I heard the name again, and knew all at once that it was Julian's voice, only altered out of all knowledge. I rushed to him. He had sunk back in his arm-chair. I asked him what was the matter, and he told me that he could not move. There was numbness in all his limbs. His arms were as heavy as lead. I seized his hand and found it cold as ice. I rang the bell with all my might, and at last one of the women servants came to my help. She roused the porter, and sent him to fetch a doctor. It was not quite four o'clock when she came to me, but it was past five o'clock before the doctor came. He told me at once that my husband had had a paralytic shock, and he helped me to get him to bed, while the porter went in search of a nurse. I wanted to have nursed Julian myself, without the help of any stranger, whose presence might worry him; but the doctor said that would be impossible. I must have a skilled nurse in attendance. There would be plenty for me to do, he said. So I submitted, and the nurse was with us in less than an hour—a nursing sister of the order of St. Vincent de Paul, a very nice person."

"Is your doctor a clever man?"

"The Frenchman who came in the morning seems clever, and at my request he brought Doctor Danvers, an English physician. I am told he is the best English doctor in Paris. They are of the same opinion as to the nature of the attack; but Doctor Danvers is inclined to look upon it more seriously than the French doctor. He declared that Julian's brain must have been terribly overworked within the last few years, and when I told him that my husband's life had to my knowledge been one of rest and quiet monotony, I could see by his face that he did not believe me."

"You say that Mr. Wyllard is already partially recovered?"

"Yes, he is much better; there is still a feeling of heaviness and dull pain. But he is such a patient sufferer, he will hardly confess he is in pain, though I can see from his face that he suffers."

The tears rushed to her eyes, and she walked hastily to the window where she stood for a few minutes with her handkerchief before her face, with her back to Heathcote, who waited silently, knowing how vain must be all consolatory speeches in the presence of so real a grief.

She conquered herself, and came back to her seat presently, with a tranquil countenance.

"Struck down in the prime of his manhood, in all the force of his intellect," she said. "It is a death-blow."

"Your English doctor may exaggerate the danger."

"God grant that it is so. I have telegraphed to Sir William

Spencer entreating him to come to Paris by to-night's mail. The question of cost is nothing—but I fear he may not be able to leave his practice so long—or he may be away from London."

"When did you telegraph?"

"An hour ago. I am expecting the answer at any moment. I hope he will come."

"What is this Doctor Danvers apprehends?"

"He fears an affection of the spinal marrow, a slow and lingering malady, full of pain. Oh, it is too dreadful," cried the agonized wife, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of despair. "What has he done to be so affected—how has he deserved such suffering, he who worked so hard, denied himself all pleasures in his youth—he who has been so good and generous to others. Why should he be tortured?"

"Dear Mrs. Wyllard, pray do not give way to grief. The doctor may be mistaken. He ought not to have told you so much."

"It was right of him to tell me. I entreated him to keep nothing from me—not to treat me as a child. If there is a martyrdom to be borne I will bear my part of it—yes, I will sufler with him, pang for pang—for to see him in pain will be as sharp an agony for me as the actual torture can be for him. He is resting now, dozing from the effects of the morphia which they have injected under the skin."

"I trust if Sir William Spencer comes that he will be able to give you a more hopeful opinion."

"Yes, I am putting my trust in that. But I am full of fear. Doctor Danvers has such a shrewd, clever air. He does not look the kind of man to be mistaken."

"But in these nervous disorders there is always room for error. You must hope for the best."

"I will try to hope, for Julian's sake. Good-by, I must go back to my place at his bedside. I don't want him to see a strange face when he awakes."

"Good-by. Remember, if there is any service I can render you, the slightest or the greatest, you have only to command me. I shall call this evening to hear how your patient progresses, and if Spencer is coming. But I shall not ask to see you."

He left the hotel full of griet at the agony of one he loved. He thought of Dora in her helplessness, her loneliness, watching the slow decay of that vigorous frame, the gradual extinction of that powerful mind. What sentence could be more awful, what martyrdom more terrible for a tender-hearted woman?

He called at the Windsor in the evening. The patient was much the same. Sir William Spencer was to be there at eight o'clock next morning.

Mr. Heathcote was watching in front of the hotel when the physician drove up in a fly from the station. Dr. Danvers had gone into the hotel a few minutes before. Heathcote waited to see Sir William Spencer leave the hotel in the same fly. He was accompanied to the carriage door by Dr. Danvers. They were talking as they came out of the *porte cochère*, and their faces were very grave. Heathcote felt that the great English doctor had not left hope behind him in those rooms on the first floor, with their sunny windows

facing the palace garden. He had not the heart to intrude upon Dora immediately after the consultation, though he was very anxious to hear Sir William's verdict. He watched the fly drive away, while Dr. Danvers walked briskly in the opposite direction; and then he strolled along the Rue de Rivoli toward the Palais Royal, hardly knowing where he went, so deeply were his thoughts occupied by the grief of the woman he loved.

If he were to die now, that successful rival of his, the man who had stolen his plighted wife from him, the thought would come, though he tried to shut his mind against it, though he hated himself for harboring so basely selfish an idea. The question would shape itself in his mind, would be answered somehow or other.

If Julian Wyllard were to die, and Dora were again free to wed whom she chose, would the old love be rekindled in her heart? Would the old love seem nearer and dearer to her than any other man on earth? Would she reward him for long years of patient devotion, for a faithfulness that had never wavered? Alas, no, he could hope for no such reward, he who had married within a year or two of losing her, who had, in the world's eye, consoled himself speedily for that loss. Could he go to her and say, "I never loved my wife; I married her out of pity. My love was given to you, and you alone"?

That was his secret. To Dora Wyllard he must have seemed as fickle as the common herd of men, who change their earthly idols as easily as they change their tailors. He could put forward no claim for past constancy. No, were she once again free, it would be by the devotion of the future that he must win her.

And then he recalled what the physician had said about Julian Wyllard's malady. It would be a slow and lingering disease—a decay of years, perhaps. He saw the dark possibility of such a martyrdom. Dora's life would be worn and wasted in the attendance upon that decaying frame, that sorely tried mind and temper. She would sacrifice health, spirits, life itself, perhaps, in devotion to that afflicted husband. And when the end at last came—the dismal end of all her care and tenderness—would she be a woman to be wooed and won? Would not life for her be over, all possibility of happiness forever gone? Only a little respite, a little rest remaining before the grave should close on her broken heart.

No, there was but little ground for selfish rejoicing, for wicked hope, in Julian Wyllard's malady.

Heathcote ordered a simple breakfast in one of the quietest *cafés* in the Palais Royal, and lingered over the meal and the newspapers till he was able to present himself with a better grace at the Windsor. He had some difficulty in reading the news of the day with attention, or even comprehension, so full were his thoughts. He recalled Julian Wyllard's manner and bearing during the last few months, and wondered at the vigor, the freshness of mind, the power which had been so obvious in every look, and tone, and gesture. That such a man could suddenly be struck down without a day's warning, without any imaginable cause, seemed almost incomprehensible. Had the nature of the attack been different the thing would have appeared less inexplicable. An apoplectic fit striking down the strong man in his might, as it from the blow of a Nasmyth

hammer, would have seemed far more in character with the nature of his patient, his vigorous manhood, his appearance of physical power.

Mr. Heathcote called at the Windsor between twelve and one o'clock, and had only a few minutes to wait in the *salon* before he was joined by Mrs. Wyllard.

She was very pale, but she was more composed than on the previous day. Her countenance had a rigid look, Heathcote thought, as if she had schooled herself to composure by a severe mental effort. The hand she gave him was deadly cold.

"I hope you have good news for me," he said. "Is Spencer more hopeful than your Paris physician?"

"No, there is no hope. I had a long talk with both the doctors after their consultation. It was very difficult to wring the truth from them both—to get them to be quite candid. They seemed to pity me so much. They were full of kindness. As if kindness or pity would help me in my trouble for *him*. Nothing can help me—no one—except God. And perhaps He will not. It seems that in this life there are a certain number of victims, chosen haphazard, who must suffer mysterious, purposeless agonies; and Julian is to be one of those sufferers. It is bitter, inexplicable, cruel. My soul revolts against these fruitless punishments."

"Tell me what Sir William said."

"The worst. Julian's symptoms indicate a disease of the spinal cord: progressive muscular atrophy. Sir William called it a disease generally caused by excessive muscular activity, but in this case due to the strain upon the mind. He will waste away inch by inch, hour by hour, and he will suffer terribly. Yes, that is the worst. This gradual decay will be a long martyrdom. He will be dependent on opiates for relief. I am to take comfort in the thought that his pain can be soothed by repeated injections of morphine. He is to exist under the influence of narcotics. He who a few months ago seemed the incarnation of health and vigor."

"A few months ago, you say? Then you have remarked a change in him of late?" inquired Heathcote.

"Yes, there has been a change, subtle, mysterious. I could not describe the symptoms to Sir William Spencer. But there was a curious alteration in his ways and manner. He was much more irritable. He had strange intervals of silence."

"Can you recall the beginning of this alteration?"

"Hardly. It was a change that seems to have had no beginning. It was so gradual—imperceptible almost. It was in that very oppressive weather at the beginning of August that I noticed he was looking ill and haggard. I thought that he was angry and worried about Bothwell, and that he was vexed at the stupidity of his bailiff, who had mismanaged one of the farms, and involved him in a law suit with one of the tenants. I fancied these things were worrying him, that the excessive heat was making him ill. I begged him to take medical advice; but he was angry at the suggestion, and declared that he never felt better in his life."

"What does Sir William advise?"

"That we should go back to Penmorval at once, or, at least, as soon as the proper arrangements can be made for the journey. I

have telegraphed to Julian's valet to come here immediately, and Sir William will send a trained nurse from London by the evening mail. We shall have plenty of help. Fortunately, it is Julian's own wish to go back to Cornwall."

"Is there any improvement in his health to-day?"

"I dare not say there is improvement. He is very calm, quite resigned. The physicians told him the nature of his malady, but they did not tell him that it is hopeless. They left his own intelligence to discover that, and I fear he knows the truth only too well already. Would you like to see him, if he is inclined to receive you?"

"Yes, I should much like to see him."

Dora went into the adjoining room, and closed the door behind her. She reopened it almost immediately, and beckoned to Heathcote, who went in with careful footstep and bated breath, almost as he might have entered the chamber of death.

Julian Wyllard was reclining on a sofa, his head and shoulders propped up by pillows, his legs covered with a fur rug. There was something in the very position of the body, so straight, so rigid a line from the waist downward, which told of that death in life that had fallen upon the strong man whom Edward Heathcote had last seen erect, in all the pride of manhood, tall, broad-shouldered, powerful-looking.

"Well, Heathcote, you have come to see the wreck of proud humanity," he said, with a half sad, half cynical smile. "You did not know when you were with us the other night that my race was so nearly run, that I was to break down in the middle of the course. I had had my warnings, but had made light of them, and the blow came unexpectedly at last. But it has left the brain clear. That is some comfort. Sit down; I want to talk to you—and Dora—seriously."

He was very pale—white to the lips even, and his wife was watching him anxiously, surprised at the signs of profound agitation in him who had been so calm after the physicians had left him.

"I am very sorry for you, Wyllard; sorry with all my heart," said Heathcote, earnestly, as he took the chair nearest the sofa, while Dora seated herself on the other side, close to her husband.

"You are more than good. I am assured that everybody will—pity me," this with a smile of bitterest meaning. "But I want to talk to you about two people in whom you and Dora are both interested—your very lovable sister, and my wife's scapegrace cousin. They are devoted to each other, it seems, and except for this little cloud upon Bothwell's character, I take it you had no objection to the match."

"That was my chief objection."

"Forgive me for saying that it was a most foolish one. Because a few country bumpkins take it into their heads to suspect a gentleman—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Wyllard, if I confess that I was among those bumpkins. Mr. Grahame's refusal to answer Mr. Distin's questions, and his obvious agitation, led me to believe that he was concerned in that girl's death. I am thankful to be able to say that my discoveries on this side of the Channel all point in a different

direction, while my sister assures me that her lover has satisfactorily explained the reason of his peculiar conduct at the inquest."

"You have no further objection to Bothwell as a husband for your sister?"

"No, my esteem for the race from which he sprung is a strong reason why I should sanction the match, although worldly wisdom is decidedly against a girl's marriage with a man who was a soldier, and who is—nothing."

"It shall be our business—Dora's and mine—to reconcile worldly wisdom and foolish love. My wife tells me that her cousin has turned over a new leaf—that he has set himself to begin a new career with a wonderful amount of energy—just that strong purpose which has been lacking in him hitherto."

"I have heard as much, and a good deal more than this, from my sister."

"Well, then, my dear Heathcote, all I need add is that means shall not be wanting to my wife's kinsman to enable him to carry out the scheme of life which he has made for himself, comfortably and creditably. Dora and I are both rich. We have no children. We can afford to be generous in the present, and those we love must naturally profit by our wealth in the future. Dora's fortune will, in all likelihood, go to Bothwell's children. In a word, your sister is not asked to marry a pauper."

"I have never thought of the question from a financial standpoint."

"But it must not be the less agreeable to you to know that the financial aspect is satisfactory," answered Wyllard. "And now what is to hinder a speedy marriage? It is my wife's wish, Bothwell's wish, mine, everybody's so far as I can understand, except yours. You are the only hinderance. Heathcote, I want to see Bothwell and Hilda united before I die."

"Julian," cried his wife, with a stifled sob.

"Oh, my dearest, I am not going to leave you yet awhile," answered her husband, clasping her hand, and raising it to his lips with infinite tenderness. "My doctors promise me a slow deliverance. But when a man has begun to die, were it ever so gradually, it is time for him to set his house in order. I should like to see Bothwell and Hilda married in Bodmin Church, before the eyes of the people who have maligned my wife's kinsman. I should like the wedding to take place as soon as possible."

"I am sure Mr. Heathcote will not refuse your request," said Dora, with a pleading look at Heathcote.

"If Hilda and her lover can fulfill their own scheme of happiness by a speedy marriage, I will not be a stumbling-block," said Heathcote.

After this they talked for a little while of indifferent subjects, of the journey back to Cornwall—that tedious journey of a helpless invalid which would be so different from any previous experience of Julian Wyllard's. He spoke of it lightly enough, affecting a philosophical disdain of the changes and chances of this little life; but Heathcote marked the quiver of his lip—the look of pain, which neither pride nor stoicism could suppress.

Yes, it was a hard thing for such a man, in the very prime of life—handsome, clever, prosperous—to be so struck down, and it could

but be said that Julian Wyllard carried himself firmly under the trial.

Heathcote and Dora parted sorrowfully outside the sick-room.

"Is it not good of him to wish to see Bothwell's happiness secured?" she said.

"It is very good of him to think of any one except himself at such a moment," answered Heathcote.

"I am so glad he has won your consent to an early marriage. And now that you have given that consent—now that we are all assured of the folly of any suspicion pointing at Bothwell—you will trouble yourself no more about the mystery of that poor girl's death."

"Not at all. I shall go on with my investigation, in the interests of justice. Besides, Bothwell's character can never be thoroughly rehabilitated till the real criminal is found; and, for a third reason, I am interested in this strange story as a work of art. Good-by, Mrs. Wyllard. If I can be of any use to you to-morrow in helping to move your invalid, pray send for me. If not, I suppose we shall not meet till I call on you at Penmorval. I leave the business of Hilda's marriage in your direction. She cannot have a better adviser than you, and whatever plans you make I shall sanction."

He left the hotel and strolled toward the Madeleine, hardly knowing what he should do with the rest of his day. He had an appointment with Sigismond Trottier in the evening. That gentleman and he were to meet at the Gymnase at the first performance of a new play, and they were to sup at Vachette's afterward, when Heathcote was to hear any fresh facts that the paragraphist might have gathered for him relating to the mysterious Georges and the once celebrated Mademoiselle Prévol. Trottier had promised to hunt up the few men who had been intimate with Georges, and to get all the information he could from them.

In front of the Madeleine Heathcote was overtaken by that good-natured merchant, Monsieur Blumenlein, who had taken so much pleasure in showing his apartments to Mrs. Wyllard. They walked on together for a short distance, in the direction of the Blumenlein establishment, and Heathcote told the merchant of his predecessor's sudden illness.

Monsieur Blumenlein was interested and sympathetic, and as they were now in front of his office, he insisted upon Mr. Heathcote going in to smoke a cigarette, or share a bottle of Lafitte with him. Heathcote accepted the cigarette, not sorry to find an excuse for revisiting his rival's old abode. He blamed himself for this curiosity about Julian Wyllard's youth, as an unworthy and petty feeling; yet, he could not resist the temptation to gratify that curiosity which chance had thrown in his way.

They went through the offices, where clerks were working at their ledgers, and warehousemen hurrying in and out, and passed into the library—that handsome, and somewhat luxurious apartment, which remained in all things, save the books upon the shelves, exactly as Julian Wyllard had left it.

"Did you know him twenty years ago?" asked Blumenlein, after they had talked of the late tenant and his wonderful career in Paris.

"No, I never saw him till just before his marriage, about seven years ago."

"Ah, then you did not know him as a young man. I have a photograph of him in that drawer yonder," pointing to a writing table, by the fire-place, "taken fifteen years ago, when he was beginning to make his fortune; when the Crédit Mauresque was at the height of its popularity. It went to smash, afterward, as, no doubt, you know; but Wyllard contrived to get out of it with clean hands --only just contrived."

"You mean to say that his part in the transaction was open to doubt?"

"My dear sir, on the Bourse, during the Empire, everything was, more or less, open to doubt. There were only two irrefragable facts in the financial world of that time. There was a great deal of money made, and a great deal of money lost. Mr. Wyllard was a very clever man, and he contrived to be from first to last on the winning side. Nobody ever brought any charge of foul play against him, and, in this matter, he was luckier, or cleverer, than the majority of his compeers."

"I should like to see that photograph of which you spoke just now," said Heathcote.

"You shall see it. A clever face, a remarkable face, I take it." answered Blumenlein, unlocking a drawer, and producing a photograph.

Yes, it was a fine head, a powerful head, instinct with wondrous vitality, with the energy of a man bound to dominate others, in any sphere of life; a master of whatever craft he practiced. It was not the face of abstract intellect. The white, cold light of the student did not illumine those eyes, nor did the calm of the student's tranquil temper inform the mouth. There was passion in the face; strongest human feelings were expressed there; the love of love, the hate of hate.

"It is a marvelous face for a money-grubber," exclaimed Heathcote, "an extraordinary countenance for a man who could shut himself from all the charms of the world, such a world as the Second Empire, a man who could be indifferent to art, beauty, wit, music, social pleasures of all kinds, and live only for his cash-box and bank-book. Difficult to reconcile this face with the life which we are told Mr. Wyllard led in these rooms."

"It is more than difficult," said Blumenlein. "It is, to my mind, impossible to believe in so monstrous an anomaly as that sordid life endured for nearly ten years by such a temperament as that which the photograph indicates. I am something of a physiognomist, and I think that I know what that face means; if faces have any meaning whatever. It means strong passions, a fervid imagination, a mind that could not be satisfied with the triumphs of successful finance. It means a nature in which the heart must have fair play. Whatever Julian Wyllard's life may have appeared in the eyes of the men with whom he had business relations—however he may have contrived to pass for the serious genius of finance, old before his time, the embodiment of abstruse calculations, far-seeing policy—be sure that the life was not a barren life, and that the scorching breath of passion had passed across the speculator's toils."

"But this life seems to have been patent to all the world."

"Yes, Mr. Heathcote, the life he led in public. But who knows how he may have plunged into the dissipations of Paris after hours? That little door in the alcove has its significance, you may be sure. I made light of it in Mrs. Wyllard's presence—women are jealous even of the past. Why should I deprive her of the pleasure of considering her husband a model of propriety, in the remote past, as well as in the present; I affected—for that dear lady's sake—to believe the side door the work of a prior tenant to Mr. Wyllard. But I happen to have documentary evidence that Mr. Wyllard had the door made for him in the third year of his tenancy. I found the receipted account of the builder who made it among some papers left by my predecessor at the back of a cupboard."

"Then you think Wyllard was a man with two faces?"

"I do," replied Blumenlein, "I think that Wyllard, the speculator, the financier, was one man; but that there was another man of whose life the world knew nothing, and who went out and came in between dusk and dawn by that side door in the court."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GENERAL RECEIVES A SUMMONS.

WHILE Bothwell was working out the scheme of an industrious, unpretentious life, to be spent with the woman he loved on that wild Cornish coast on which he had been reared, and which was to him as a passion, Lady Valeria Harborough was shining in the county and military society within twenty miles of Plymouth—admired, envied, to outward seeming the most fortunate of women. She went everywhere, she received every one worth receiving. She had brought something of the easy manners, the unceremonious gayety of Simla to her Devonshire villa. Her afternoon parties were the gayest in the neighborhood. Her weekly musical evenings were the rage. She engaged the best professional talent obtainable for these evenings. She rigidly eschewed the amateur element. She selected music and songs with an extraordinary tact, and contrived that no hackneyed composition should ever be heard at her parties. The newest ballads, the last successes in modern classical music were first revealed to the neighborhood at Harborough Villa. There people heard the gavotte that was going to be fashionable, the song that was to be the rage next year, and on these evenings when the flowery corridors, the long suite of rooms, were filled with guests, when the spacious music-room, with its two grand pianos and magnificent organ, was thrown open to the crowd, Lady Valeria circulated amidst the throng, gracious, graceful, smiling, a queen among women, not so beautiful as the fairest of her guests, but by far the most attractive of them all. There was a subtle charm in those dreamy eyes and in that languid smile. Beardless subalterns worshiped her as if she had been a goddess; and many a man who could hardly have been included in Lady Valeria's list of "nice boys," felt his heart beat faster as she lingered by his side for a few minutes. She had a smile and a word for every one who crossed

her threshold: the most insignificant guest was greeted and remembered. She seemed a woman who lived only for society, who had fulfilled her mission when she had been admired. The general was proud of his young wife's success, delighted that his house should be known as the pleasantest in the county. He could afford that money should be spent as if it were water. He never complained of the expenses of his establishment, but he knew the cost of everything, and paid all accounts with his own checks. Unluckily for Lady Valeria, old habits of strict accountancy, acquired in the days when he was adjutant of his regiment, had clung to him. He liked accounts, and was in some measure his own house-steward. There was no possibility of Lady Valeria's gambling debts being paid out of the domestic funds. Everything was done on a large scale, but by line and rule. A royal household could not have been managed more rigidly. Thus it was that Lady Valeria's money difficulties were very real difficulties, and it was only by a full confession of her folly that she could have obtained her husband's help.

It was just this confession, this humiliation, to which Lady Valeria could not bring herself. Candor was the very feeblest of her instincts. She had not been brought up in the school of truth. Her father had been a tyrant, her mother a dealer in expedients, a diplomatist, a marvel of tact and cleverness, able to achieve wonders in domestic management, in social policy. But life at Lostwithiel Castle had been a constant strain, and duplicity had become an instinct with mother and children. There had been always something to hide from the earl—a son's debts, a daughter's flirtation, a milliner's bill, a debt of honor. Valeria had been oppressed with gambling debts before she was twenty. She had played deep, and borrowed money in her first season. She had married, hoping that General Harborough's wealth would be hers to spend as she pleased; but in this she had been disappointed. She had married the most generous of men, but she had married a man of business. He made a magnificent settlement before marriage; he made a will after marriage, leaving the bulk of his fortune to his young wife, to be hers, and in her own control, if there were no children—hers without any embargo as to a second marriage. She had pin-money that would have been a liberal allowance for a countess, but she had not the handling of her husband's income. She could not have cheated him out of a five-pound note. He had told her in the beginning of their married life that it would be so. He was a man of business, and she was too young to be troubled with the sordid details of domestic life.

"Order what you like, love. Make our home as beautiful as you can. I will pay your bills, and take care that you are not cheated by your tradesmen."

At the outset Lady Valeria had accepted this arrangement as altogether delightful; but there came a time when she found that it had its inconveniences.

To-night, in the balmy September weather, the windows of the villa were all open to the sky and the garden—open to the music of the distant sea, and Lady Valeria was sitting in the veranda where a week ago she had bidden farewell to Bothwell Grahame. It was nearly midnight, and the crowd was concentrated in the music-

room, where Herr Stalmann was playing a new Sauterelle on his violoncello. The moon was shining over the sea yonder, gleaming upon the long, white line of breakwater, and the distant view of Plymouth looked even more Italian than in the daytime. Lady Valeria wore a long, flowing gown of an almost Grecian simplicity, a gown of dead-white cashmere, bordered with a marvelous embroidery of peacocks' feathers, which fell in a slanting line from shoulder to hem, the brilliant coloring flashing in the moonlight, as the wearer slowly fanned herself with a large peacock-feather fan.

"Are you not afraid to wear so many peacocks' feathers?" asked a gentleman who was sitting at her elbow, a handsome man of about forty, a man who was not altogether good style in dress or manner, but who had a certain ease and authority, which indicated good birth and the habits of good society.

This was Sir George Mildmay, a personage in the racing world, but reputed to have been utterly broken for the last three years. In the racing world there is always a chance so long as a man can keep his head above water, and Sir George might still have a future before him. Although he was supposed to have spent his last farthing and mortgaged his last acre, he always contrived to get money when he wanted it, and he had contrived to lend money to Lady Valeria.

"Why should I not wear peacocks' feathers?" Lady Valeria asked, languidly.

Her profile was turned to him, her eyes were looking toward the line of moonlight on the sea, the white walls of barracks and storehouses. She did not take the trouble to turn her face to her companion as she spoke to him. Pale, languid, dreamy, she seemed the very image of indifference.

"Because they are considered so"—casting about for a mild expression—"confoundedly unlucky. I remember the morning of the Oaks, the year my Cherryripe shut up like a telescope half a furlong from the winning-post, my sister Grace drove up to Hatchetts to meet the drag.—I was to drive her and a lot of 'em to Epsom, don't you know—with an infernal pork pie hat made out of a peacock's breast. 'What did you wear that d——d thing for?' I asked. 'Because it's the fashion,' says she. 'Shouldn't wonder if my mare lost the race on account of your d——d fashion,' says I. Grace chaffed me for my superstition; but the mare made a most unaccountable mess of herself, don't you know, and the Devil himself or that peacock-feather hat must have been at the bottom of it."

"I don't think the peacock's feather will make any difference to me," replied Valeria, wearily. "I have been unlucky all my life."

"Well, fate has been rather hard upon you," said Sir George, drawing his chair a little nearer to hers, gazing at the delicate profile with a more ardent look than was quite within the lines of friendship and good-fellowship. "A beautiful young woman married to a man old enough to be her grandfather—carried off to broil away her existence in Bengal, when she ought to have been one of the queens of London society—stinted to a bare allowance of pin-money, hardly enough to pay her dress-maker, by Jove, when she ought to have had the command of her husband's purse. Why not cut the whole business, Valeria, and go to the South of France with me

directly after the Newmarket week? I stand to win a pot of money, and we can spend it merrily at Monaco. I know how to make plenty more when that's gone. And, by and by, when the general goes off the hooks, we can make things fair and square with the world, or before, if you prefer it. The thing can be so easily managed. Look at your cousin, Lady Cassandra, and the colonel—and the duke and his countess—change of partners all round."

He tried to encircle the slim waist with his strong arm—the arm of a man who had won cups at Lillie Bridge in days gone by—but she snatched herself from him with a disdainful laugh, rose from her chair and walked to the other end of the veranda, he following her, sorely disconcerted. He had been watching for his opportunity, and he fancied the opportunity had come. He had neither creed nor principles of his own, and he believed that people who pretended to be better than himself were all hypocrites. Like Dumas's hero, he was ready to admit that there might be good women in the world—only he had never happened to meet with one.

He had made himself useful to Lady Valeria—had told her what horses to back, and had helped her to win a good deal of money since her return to England. Her losses had been the result of her own inspirations; and when she had so lost he had found her the money to settle with the bookmen. And having done all this, and having devoted all his leisure to the cultivation of Lady Valeria's acquaintance, he deemed that the time was ripe for him to ask her to run away with him. He had run away with so many women in the course of the last twenty years that his manner of proposing the thing had become almost a formula. He modified his appeal according to the rank of the adored one—had his first, second, and third class supplications; but it was not in his nature to be poetical. Had he been making love to an empress, he could not have risen to any loftier height than that which he had reached to-night.

Lady Valeria turned at the end of the veranda, and faced him deliberately in the bright, cold moonlight a white and ghost-like figure, with pale face and flashing eyes. She measured him from head to foot with a look of intense scorn, gazed at him steadily, with eyes that seemed to read all the secrets of his evil life; and then, slowly unfurling her peacock fan, she broke into a silvery laugh, long and clear, and sweet, but with a ring of contemptuousness in its every note.

"You are mistaken, Sir George," she said, quietly, moving toward the open window of the corridor, as if to return to the house. "Your almost infallible judgment is at fault. I am not that kind of person."

She would have passed him and gone into the house, but he put himself between her and the open window. He barred her way with all the bulk of his handsome over-dressed person. That ringing laughter, the insolent sparkle in her magnificent eyes, goaded him to madness. Sir George had a diabolical temper, and the insensate vanity of a successful *roué*. That any one woman could really despise him was beyond his power of belief, but a woman who pretended to despise him put herself beyond the pale of his courtesy.

"No," he muttered, savagely. "You are not that kind of per-

son. You are not that kind of person for me, because for the last three years you have been that kind of person for somebody else. I thought you must have been tired of Bothwell Grahame by this time, and that I should have had my chance."

In a breath, as if from the stroke of a Cyclop's hammer, George Mildmay had measured his length upon the tesselated pavement under the veranda. It was an old man's arm that felled him; but an athlete of five-and-twenty could not have struck a better blow.

General Harborough had stolen into the gardens to smoke a solitary cigar, while Herr Stalmann played his Sauterelle, and, coming quietly round the house, he had approached just in time to hear Sir George's last speech. He had not hesitated a minute as to the manner of his answer.

"Go to your guests, Valeria," he said, with quiet command, "I will see to this blackguard."

Valeria obeyed half mechanically. The shock of those last few moments had made thought impossible. Her mind seemed to have suddenly become a blank. She went through the brilliant rooms, wondering at the lights and flowers and smartly-dressed people, seeing everything vaguely, with a puzzled doubtfulness as to her own identity. She talked and laughed with more than usual animation for the rest of the evening. She had a friendly smile and a pleasant word for each departing guest. She enchanted the artists by her appreciation of their work; yet she had no more consciousness of what she said or to whom she spoke than a condemned criminal might have on the eve of his execution.

It was nearly two o'clock when she went to her own rooms—those spacious rooms, with their windows looking three different ways, over hill and valley, town and sea—rooms beautified by all that art and wealth can compass in the way of luxury—rooms in which she had sat hour after hour, day after day brooding treason, caring more for one look from Bothwell's dark eyes than for all that glory of sea and land—for all the luxuries with which an adoring husband had surrounded her.

She had seen the general moving about among his guests at the last. She had heard the strong, cheery tones of his voice as he parted with some particular friend; and now she wondered if she would find him in her morning-room, where, on such a night as this, they had been wont to spend half an hour in light, careless talk, after the people were gone, he sitting out on the balcony, perhaps, smoking a final cigar.

Yes, he was there before her, sitting on a sofa, in a meditative attitude, with his elbow on his knees, far from the lamp, with its low, spreading shade—a lamp which shed a brilliant light upon Lady Valeria's own particular writing-table, and left all the rest of the room in shadow.

Then, at the sight of that familiar figure, the bent head, the honored gray hairs—all the horror of the scene in the veranda flashed back upon her. The unutterable insult of Sir George's speech—such insult as might have been flung at the lowest woman in London, speech shaped just as it might have been shaped for such an one. That she, Lady Valeria Harborough, should have such dirt

cast in her face, and that the man who had so spoken could live to tell other men what he had said—to boast of himself at the clubs.

"Would to God that blow had killed him," she said to herself, and then she went over and knelt at her husband's feet, and took his strong hand in hers, and kissed it.

"God bless you for defending me," she said. "I am not a good woman—I am not worthy of you—but I am not such a wretch as that man's words would make me. You will believe that—won't you, Walter?"

"Yes, my dear, I believe that. I can not think you a false wife, Valeria, though you may be an unloving one. I have thought for a long time that the sweet words and sweeter smiles which have made the light of my life might mean very little, after all—might mean just the daily sacrifice which a young wife makes to an old husband, and no more. Yet I have contrived to be happy, Valeria, in spite of all such doubts; and now this man's foul taunt comes like a blast from a Polar sea, and freezes my blood. What did it mean, Valeria? I thought Bothwell Grahame was my friend. I have been almost as fond of him as if he were my son."

"He is your friend, Walter; yes, your true and loyal friend, more loyal than I have been as your wife."

"What disloyalty have you practiced toward me?" he demanded, grasping her by the shoulder, looking into those frightened eyes of hers with his honest and steady gaze, the look of a man who would read all secrets in her face, even the worst. "What has there ever been between you and Bothwell which could involve disloyalty to me? Don't lie to me, Valeria! There must have been some meaning in the man's speech. He would not have dared so to have spoken if he had not had some knowledge. What has Bothwell been to you?"

"He loved me!" faltered the pale lips.

"And you returned his love?"

She only hung her head for answer, the beautiful head on the slim and graceful throat, circled with that string of pearls which had been her husband's last birthday gift.

"You returned his love—and you encouraged him to come to your husband's house, to be your chosen companion at all times and seasons, the 'nice boy' of whom you spoke so lightly as to disarm suspicion. By heaven! I would as soon have suspected your footman as Bothwell Grahame!"

"He was never more to me than a friend. I know how to respect myself," she answered, with a touch of sullenness.

"You knew how to respect yourself, and you spent half your days in the society of a lover. Is that your idea of self-respect? It is not mine. You respected yourself, and you were careful of your own interests so far as to refrain from running away with the man you loved. What need of an elopement, when the sands must soon run down in the hour-glass, and the old husband would be gone, leaving you a rich widow, free to marry the man of your heart? No need to defy the world, to outrage society, when everything would work round naturally to give you your own way. Oh, Valeria, it is hard for a man to have his eyes opened after years of

happy blindness. I was better off as your dupe than I am as your confessor."

He laughed bitterly, a contemptuous laugh, at the thought of his own folly. To think that he had believed it possible this woman could love him: this lovely, spiritual creature, all light and flame —to suppose that such a woman could be happy as an old man's darling, that this young bright soul could be satisfied with the worship of declining years, the steady glow of affection, constant, profound, but passionless. No, for such a soul as this the fiery element was a necessity. Love without passion was love without poetry.

Well, the dream was over. He believed that this proud woman had not dishonored him, that she could stand up before the world stainless, a perfect wife. But he felt not the less that the dream of his declining years was over; that she could never more be to him as she had been, the sweetest companion of his leisure, the trusted partner of his life. That was all over and done with. He was not going to scold her, or to torture her, or to thrust her from him. To what end? The gulf would be wide enough living side by side. He would pay her all honor before the world to the end of his days. To live with her, and to be kind to her, knowing that her heart belonged to another, should be his sacrifice, his penance for having tied that young sapling to his withered trunk.

"I have noticed that Grahame has kept aloof from us of late," he said, after a long silence. "Why is that?"

"We agreed that it was better we should see no more of each other," his wife answered quietly.

"I hope you will always remain in that agreement," said the general.

He sat up till daybreak, and he occupied part of his time in writing the rough draft of a codicil to his will, which he meant to take to his London solicitors at the earliest opportunity.

The codicil lessened Lady Valeria's fortune considerably, and allotted forty thousand pounds to a fund, the interest of which was to be distributed in the form of pensions to twenty widows of field-officers who had died in impoverished circumstances. This subtraction would still leave an estate which would make Lady Valeria Harborough a very rich widow and a splendid prize in the matrimonial market.

"She will marry Bothwell Grahame, and forget the days of her slavery," thought the general, as he wrote the closing paragraph of his codicil.

It was from no malignant feeling against his wife that he made that change in the disposition of his wealth. He felt that the act was mere justice. To the wife whom he had believed wholly true he bequeathed all. To the woman who had been only half loyal he left half. A mean man would have fettered his bequest by the prohibition of a second marriage, but General Harborough was not that kind of man.

He wondered whether Sir George Mildmay would take any action in the matter of that blow. He had assisted the fallen man to a chair in the veranda, and had taken him a tumbler of brandy, which Sir George drank as if it had been water. In his half-stunned

condition the baronet had sworn an oath or two, and had walked off muttering curses, which might mean threats of speedy vengeance.

"If he is the scoundrel I think him, he will send me a summons, in order to drag my wife's name into the business," thought General Harborough. Nor was he mistaken, for the summons was served within two days of the assault. It was delivered at the villa in the general's absence. He had started for Bath by the early train that morning, in order to attend the funeral of an old friend and brother officer upon the following day. He had an idea of going on from Bath to London, to see his solicitors, and to execute the codicil which was to lessen Lady Valeria's expectations.

At the station he met Bothwell Grahame, who was on his way to Dawlish.

There had been a reserve in the young man's manner of late which had puzzled the general. He had put down the change to a deterioration in Grahame's character, a gradual going to the bad, for he had an instinctive prejudice against a soldier who would voluntarily abandon his profession. It was bad enough for a man to be chucked out of active service in the prime of life, in accordance with new-fangled rules and regulations; but that a young man should abandon soldiering for any other career seemed to General Harborough at once inexplicable and discreditable. "Bothwell Grahame is getting a regular hang-dog look," thought the general; "and I am not surprised at it. He has thrown away splendid opportunities, and is leading an idle, good-for-nothing life."

And now the general knew the meaning of that hang-dog look, that reserved manner which had struck him as the outward sign of an inward deterioration in the man he had loved as a son. He could understand what agonies of shame and remorse Bothwell must have felt when their hands touched, what self contempt was expressed in that cloudy brow and furtive glance.

What, then, was his surprise this morning to see Bothwell approach him with a beaming countenance, holding out the hand of friendship!

"My dear general, I am so glad to see you. It is such an age since we met," he exclaimed, in cheeriest tones.

Yes, there was the old ring in his voice, the old heartiness which had made Bothwell so different from the race of languid toplings—the haw-haw tribe.

"Yes, it is some time since we met," answered the general, coldly; "but I dare say you and my wife have seen each other pretty frequently during that time. You are the kind of man our neighbors call '*l'ami de la maison.*' We English have a less honorable name for the species. We call them tame cats."

Bothwell reddened, and then grew pale. Never before had those kindly eyes of the old general looked at him as they looked to-day. Never before had the general addressed him in a tone which sounded like deliberate insult.

"I have been proud to be Lady Valeria's guest," he said quietly, his heart beating furiously the while, "and have never considered myself degraded by any attention I was able to show to her. I hope Lady Valeria is well."

"She is very well. How long is it since you were at the Villa?"

"Nearly a fortnight."

"So long?"

"I have been very much occupied," said Bothwell, divining that something had occurred to excite the general's suspicions, and that it behooved him to speak frankly of his new hopes. "I have been working a good deal harder than I have ever worked since I passed my last examination. But we are just going to start. May I get into the same carriage with you?"

"If you like," said the general, which hardly sounded encouraging; but Bothwell, who was virtuously traveling third-class, got into a first-class compartment with the general.

"And, pray, what new trade are you working at?" asked the old man, fixing Bothwell with the clear, keen gaze of honest gray eyes, eyes which had almost the brightness of youth.

Bothwell explained his new plans, the general listening with polite attention, but with none of the old friendliness, that cheery kindness which had so often been to Bothwell as a whip of scorpions, torturing him with the sense of his own meanness.

"And pray what may be the motive of this industrious spurt?" asked the general, "what has inspired this idea of a usetul life?"

"A very old-fashioned and hackneyed motive, general. I am engaged to be married, and have to think of how I can best provide a home for my wife."

"Indeed. Is the engagemnt of long standing?"

"Not at all. I have been engaged within the last fortnight, but I have known and admired the lady for a long time."

General Harborough looked at him searchingly. Was this a lie—a ready lie invented on the spur of the moment, to dispel suspicion? Bothwell had doubtless perceived the alteration in his old friend's teelings toward him, and he might consider this notion of an engagement the readiest way of throwing dust in a husband's eyes.

"Do I know the young lady?" he asked, quietly.

"I think not. She has not been much away from her home, but her brother is a well-known personage in Plymouth. The lady is Hilda Heathcote, sister of Mr. Heathcote, the coroner for Cornwall."

"Indeed! I have heard of Mr. Heathcote. So you are going to marry Miss Heathcote—rather a good match, I suppose."

"I have never considered it from a worldly point of view. Miss Heathcote is a most lovable girl, and has all the charms and accomplishments which the most exacting lover could desire in his betrothed. I am infinitely proud of having won her."

He met the general's eyes, and the steady light in his own was the light of truth. General Harborough doubted him no longer. If he had ever loved Valeria that passion was extinct, dead as the flames of Dido's funeral pyre. The man who sat face to face with General Harborough to-day was a happy lover, and radiant with the light of a pure authorized love.

"When are you going to be married?" asked the general, after a longish pause.

"As soon as I can set my house in order and induce Hilda to name the day," answered Bothwell frankly. "My dear girl has

to be submissive to her brother's will in this matter, and he is now in Paris. Nothing can be finally settled till he comes back. I am stealing a march upon him to-day in going to see the lady—who has been sent to Dawlish to be out of the way."

"Oh, she is at Dawlish, is she?"

"Yes, she is staying there with her nieces and their governess. I am going to consult her about our house."

"Our house!" What pride there was in the utterance. The general's doubts were gradually melting away. He could not believe that a man who was so obviously in love with his betrothed could have ever cared much for Valeria. To have loved her, and to have exchanged her love for that of any other woman living, seemed to the general an impossibility. He began to think that his wife had exaggerated the situation the other night in the overwrought state of her nerves, stung to madness by Mildmay's insolent speech, excited by her husband's retaliation. He began to think that there had been only the mildest flirtation between Bothwell and his wife—the ordinary up-country sentimentality, meaningless, puerile.

He tried to comfort himself with this view of the case. His natural kindness of heart prompted him to help Bothwell if he could. He wanted to respect the wife he loved, to think well of the man who had saved his life.

"My dear Bothwell," he said, "you have come to a crisis in life which most men find as costly as it is delightful. If by any chance you happen to be what our young people call 'short,' I hope you will allow me to be your banker."

"You are too good," faltered Bothwell, strongly moved. "You have always been too good to me—ever so much better than I deserved. No, I am wonderfully well off. My cousin has advanced me a sum of money which she wishes me to take as a gift, but which I intend to treat as a loan."

"That is generally a distinction without a difference—when the transaction is between relations," said the general, smiling.

"Oh! but in this case I hope the loan will be repaid, for the repayment will hinge upon my prosperity. I have opened a banking account at Bodmin, and feel myself a moneyed man."

General Harborough encouraged Bothwell to talk of his sweetheart and his prospects all the way to Dawlish; and then, when the train stopped at the little station beside the sea, Bothwell and his old friend shook hands cordially, and Bothwell felt that he could clasp that honest hand without a pang of conscience. Little did he think that it was the last time that hand would rest in his.

"Let me know the date of your wedding," cried the general, as the train moved off; and Bothwell went in high spirits to look for the temple, in the shape of a pretty little house in a garden by the sea, which enshrined his goddess. Fortune seemed to be showering her gifts upon him with a bounteous hand. Nothing could have been more propitious than this meeting with General Harborough, who had promised all the help his influence could afford to the "Army coach."

The general went on to his destination. The gay white city of Bath had no attraction for him upon this particular afternoon. He called

on the widow of his old friend, and comforted her as much as it was possible for any one to comfort her in her great sorrow. He dined alone and sadly at his hotel, and as he sat and pondered on the events of the last week he began to speculate how much or how little grief *his* widow would feel when her day of mourning came. Would her eyelids be puffy and red as poor Mrs. Thornton's had been this afternoon when he was talking to her? Would her swollen lips quiver, and her distorted features twitch convulsively? Would her whole frame be shaken with sobs when she talked of the departed? He could not imagine Lady Valeria with puffy eyelids or swollen lips. He pictured her mourning gracefully, clad in softest white draperies, reclining in a darkened room, in an atmosphere perfumed with tuberose and stephanotis. He pictured her with a sphinx-like countenance, calm, beauitful, an expression which might mean deepest grief or stoniest indifference, as the world chose to construe it.

No, honestly, after considering the question from every possible point of view, General Harborough did not believe that his wife would grieve for him.

"It will be a relief to her when I am gone," he said to himself. "How could I expect her to grieve as Thornton's wife grieves? Those two were boy and girl together, had been husband and wife for thirty years."

His dinner had been only a pretense of dining, a mockery which had made the head-waiter quite unhappy. Nothing so distresses a good waiter as a guest who won't eat. The waiter would have been still more troubled in mind had he known that this fine looking old man, with the erect figure and broad shoulders, had eaten hardly anything for the last three days. The general had been suffering all that time from a fever of the brain which had brought about a feverish condition of the body. He could neither eat nor sleep. He lay broad awake in the unfamiliar room at the hotel, staring at the blank white blinds, faintly illuminated by the lamps in the street below—he lay and thought over his wedded life, which unrolled itself before him in a series of pictures, and he saw the bitter truth underlying his marriage with Lord Lostwithiel's daughter.

He had been nothing but a convenience to Valeria, the provider of fine houses and fine gowns, horses and carriages. She had not even cared for him as friend and protector. She had lived her own life, paying him for all benefits with sweet, false words, and sweeter, falser kisses.

And now the spell was broken—the dream had come to an end all at once. He could never believe in sweet words or kisses again. He had looked into the heart of this woman he had loved so well, and he knew that it was false to the core.

* * * * * * *

The next day was wild and stormy—rain and wind, wind and rain—a gray sky, a heavy pall of cloud through which the sun pierced not once in the long bleak day: one of those days which nature keeps in stock for the funerals of our friends.

General Harborough stood in the dreary cemetery, and let the wind and rain beat upon him unflinchingly for about forty minutes.

He paid every tribute of respect that could be paid to his old comrade; and then he went off to the railway station to go back to Plymouth by the train which left Bath at five o'clock, and would arrive in Plymouth a little before eleven. He had given up the idea of going on to London to execute the codicil. That could be done at Plymouth, if need were. He felt tired and ill and shivery. He thought he had taken a chill in the cemetery, and that the best thing he could do was to go home.

He had a bad night, disturbed by a short, hard cough, which was worse next morning. Lady Valeria sent for the doctor, who pronounced the indisposition an attack of bronchitis. The patient was very feverish, and the utmost care was needed. Happily, the valet was a good nurse, and Lady Valeria seemed devoted. She sat by her husband's bedside; she read to him, and ministered to him with the tenderest care.

"You could not be better off," said the medical man, who was of the cheery old school. "We shall make you all right in a day or two," knowing perfectly well that the patient was in for a fortnight's close confinement and severe regimen.

The general endured his poultices and blisters meekly, but chafed at the hot room and the hissing steam-kettle.

"It is worse than being wounded on the field of battle," he said.

And then, half asleep and half delirious, he began to talk about Sir George Mildmay's summons.

"The scoundrel wants to make a public scandal," he muttered; "he will bring my wife's name before the public. I thought by this time you must have been tired of Bothwell Grahame," he said, repeating the words which had stung him almost to madness.

Valeria knelt by her husband's pillow and laid her head against it, listening intently to those muttered speeches. She found out that Sir George Mildmay had sent him a summons to a police court; that the story of that blow in the veranda would be sifted in a public inquiry; that the insult offered to the wife, the prompt retaliation of the husband, would be reported in the newspapers, written about, commented upon everywhere. It was just the kind of thing to get into the society papers; and although Lady Valeria's relations had not unfrequently figured in those very papers, with various degrees of discredit to themselves and amusement to the general public, she shrunk with an abhorrent feeling from the idea of seeing her own name there.

The day named in the summons was a week off; and, judging from General Harborough's condition, it did not seem likely that he would be in a fit state to answer to the summons in person. The idea of it evidently preyed upon his mind, and added fuel to the fire of the fever.

The day came, and General Harborough had obeyed a mightier summons, and had gone to appear before the bar of a greater court. Lady Valeria was a widow.

The codicil had not been executed. So Lady Valeria was a very rich widow.

CHAPTER XIX.

WIDOWED AND FREE.

MR. AND MRS. WYLLARD went slowly back to Penmorval. It was a melancholy journey for those two who had traveled so gayly in days gone by—the young wife so full of hope, so proud of her husband, who was her senior and superior, versed in the knowledge of that wide outer world of which the Cornish heiress knew so little. She had loved him with a reverent, admiring love, looking up to him, honoring him and deferring to him in all things, pleased to be dependent upon him, and now he was the dependent, looking to her for help and comfort.

He bore his calamity with an almost awful calmness, which at times was more painful to the tender, sympathetic wife than fretfulness and complaining would have been. The dull agony of neuralgic pain wrung no groan from him; he endured the anguish of racked nerves and aching limbs with heroic fortitude.

"It is not a surprise to me, Dora," he said, quietly, when his wife praised him for his courage. "I have expected some such attack. There have been sensations—strange feelings at odd times—which, although slight enough, have not been without their meaning. Life was very smooth for me here at Penmorval. Very different from my life in the past; the struggles of my boyhood; the hard work and hard thinking of my manhood. Your love made existence full of sweetness. I had the world's esteem, too, which must always count for something, let a man pretend to despise the world as he may. Yes, it was a full and perfect life, and I told myself that I had come off a winner in the lottery of Fate. And now all things are changed. There was this last lot waiting for me in the bottom of the urn."

"My dearest," murmured his wife, nestling closer to him among the heaped-up pillows of his couch, "it would be too hard, too cruel that you should be thus smitten, if this life were all. But praised be God, it is not all! There is the fair, bright eternity for us—the long day of rest in the land where there is neither sorrow nor pain."

Her husband answered with an impatient sigh.

"My dear Dora, I have neither your sweet simplicity nor your pious faith in the letters of an old book," he answered. "This life is so palpable and so painful, just now, that I can not comfort myself by looking beyond it toward a life of which I know nothing."

They were at Penmorval. Mrs. Wyllard had established her husband in her own particular sanctum, which was the prettiest room in the house—a spacious airy room on the first floor, with a large Tudor window facing southward, and an oriel in the south-western angle. Julian Wyllard had decorated and furnished this room for his young wife; and all things it contained had been chosen with reference to her tastes and pursuits. It opened into her dressing-

room, and beyond the dressing-room there was the chief bed-chamber of Penmorval, the chamber of the lord of the manor from time immemorial, the birth-chamber and the death-chamber. Its very spaciousness and grandeur gave to this apartment an air of gloom, a gloom intensified by the prevailing tints of the tapestry, a series of hunting scenes, executed in a somber gradation of bluish greens and grayish browns. The carved oak wardrobes were like monuments in a Gothic cathedral. The bed, with its embroidered velvet hangings and plumed ornaments, suggested a royal catafalque; while the fireplace, with its sculptured pillars and heavy decoration in black and white marble, recalled the entrance to the Capulet's tomb. Not a room assuredly for the occupation of an invalid—not a room in which to suffer sleepless nights and long hours of dull, wearing pain.

This was what Dora thought; and at her order her dressing-room, which was airy and sufficiently spacious, was transferred into a bedroom for Mr. Wyllard, while the morning-room was arranged for his daily occupation. It would be easy to wheel his sofa from one room to the other. All her orders had been telegraphed beforehand, and everything was in its place when the sufferer arrived.

"It is a special privilege to be nursed by a good fairy," he said, smiling up at his wife, with that rare smile which had so peculiar a charm in her eyes—the smile of a man who has not the same set graciousness for all comers.

After this there came the full monotony of suffering—the life of routine, that death-in-life from which all possibility of action is gone, all power of choice, all changes and chances of the outer world cut off forever—a life in which a man feels that he has suddenly dropped back into infancy, and is as helpless as a child upon his mother's knee. The child has all the unexplored future before him, the infinite possibilities of life. The man turns his sad eyes backward and reviews the past. All things he has done and the things he has left undone pass in a shadowy procession before his mind's eye. He sees how much wiser he might have been. The faults and follies of those departed years are unrolled before him, as on a magic scroll. His maturer judgment, his colder blood, condemn the sins of his passionate youth.

Dora was her husband's companion through many an hour of gloom and depression. There were times when he would talk to her with a kind of feverish animation—talk of the books he had read, or of the men he had known—recall the memories of his youth—his boyhood even.

"I can only live in the past," he said, "and in your love. You are my present and my future, Dora. Were it not for you and your love I should have anticipated annihilation. The grave could hardly reduce me to more complete nothingness than this death-in-life here."

He looked round the room with an impatient sigh. And then, touched with the pathetic look in his wife's face, he added:

"Were it not for you, Dora— I have infinite riches while I possess your love. If I were to lose that now—"

"You know that you can never lose it. My love is a part of my life."

"Yes, but there might come a crushing blow that would kill it.

Or if I were to sink into feebleness and imbecility—if the mind were to decay like the body—"

"The only difference would be to make me love you more fondly, knowing that you stood in greater need of my love," answered his wife quietly.

"Yes, I believe you are noble enough for any sacrifice," he said, gazing at her with a searching look, a look of the deepest love and keenest pain, a look that told of anguish surpassing the common woes of humanity. 'Yes, I believe it is within the compass of a woman's nature to love a human wreck like me, or even to love a creature stained with blackest sin. There is no limit to the sublimity of a woman's love."

His wife was kneeling by his couch, her head leaning against his pillow. There were times when she could find no words of comfort, when she could only comfort him with the light touch of her lips upon his brow, her sympathy, her presence, her hand laid gently upon his.

"I love to hear you talk of your youth," she said one day, when he had been talking of his life at Marlborough, and at home—the dull old parsonage—the house-mother, with her carefulness about many things, the father chewing the cud of somebody else's sermon in a shabby little den of a study, reeking of tobacco, a sermon to be dribbled out slowly next morning, in a style of elocution, or non-elocution, happily almost extinct.

"Tell me about your life in Paris," she went on, encouraging him to forget his present pains in those old memories; "it must have been full of interest."

"It was a life of grinding toil and gnawing anxiety," he answered impatiently. "There is not a detail that could interest you."

"Everything in your past history interests me, Julian. I know how hard you worked in Paris. I saw your desk, the place where you sat night after night, the lamp that lighted you. Mr. Blumenlein has altered nothing in your rooms."

"Vastly civil of him," muttered Wyllard, as if revolting against patronage from the merchant of toys and small-gear.

"But, however hard you worked, you must have had some associations with the outer world," pursued Dora. "You must have felt the fever and the excitement of that time. You must have been interested in the men who governed France."

"I was interested in the stocks that went up and down, and in the men who governed France, so far as their conduct influenced the Stock Exchange. A man who is running a race, neck or nothing, a race that means life or death, has no time to think of anything outside the race-course. The outside world has no existence for him."

"And you knew nothing of the master-spirits of the Empire, the men of science, the writers, the painters?"

"My child, how innocent you are. The men who write books and paint pictures have no more direct influence upon an epoch than the tailors who build coats and the milliners who make gowns. The master-spirits are the politicians and financiers. Those are the rulers of their age. All the rest are servants."

Bothwell had shown himself deeply moved by the affliction that

had fallen on his cousin's husband. Every feeling of ill-will vanished in a breath before the face of that supreme misfortune—a life smitten to the dust. Bothwell was too generous-hearted to remember that the master of Penmorval had not been altogether kind in the past. His only thought was how he could help—were it by ever so little—to lighten Julian Wyllard's burden. He was all the more sympathetic when he found that the sufferer had thought of him and of his interests even in the hour of calamity, while the blow that crushed him was still a new thing.

"It was more than good of you to consider my happiness at such a time," said Bothwell, when Dora had told him of her husband's conversation with Edward Heathcote.

"My dear Bothwell, my wife's interests are my own; and I knew that she was keenly interested in your happiness. Heathcote has not found out very much about the girl who was killed; but he has found out just enough to dispel his suspicions about you, and he withdraws all opposition to your marriage with Hilda. Now, it is my earnest desire to see you happily married before I am called away; and as life is always uncertain—trebly uncertain for a man in my condition—the sooner you are married the better."

"I shall not plead for delay," said Bothwell, "if I can win Hilda's consent to an early marriage. But I hope, my dear Wyllard, that you may live to see our children growing up."

"That is to hope for the indefinite prolongation of an incurable disease, Bothwell, and is hardly a kind wish on your part. All you have to do is to hurry on this marriage."

"Unfortunately the house I have pitched upon will want three or four months' work before it can be habitable."

"What does that matter? You can live at Penmorval till your house is ready. There is room for half a dozen families in this rambling old place. There will be no one here to interfere with your privacy. You may be almost as much alone as in your own home, and Hilda's presence in the house will help to cheer my poor wife. Hurry on your marriage, Bothwell, while Heathcote is in the humor to acccept you. Don't be hindered by any absurd consideration about houses. Secure your good fortune while you can."
He spoke with an almost feverish impatience, the fretfulness of a sick man who can not bear the slightest opposition to his will.

"My dear Julian, you may be sure that Bothwell will be only too glad to act on your advice," said his wife, soothingly.

"Let him do so, then, and don't let him talk about houses," retorted Julian.

Bothwell was to meet his betrothed next day at Trevenna, where she was to go with Fräulein Meyerstein to inspect the old-fashioned cottage which her lover wanted to turn into a commodious house. There could not be a better opportunity for pleading his cause.

He rode across country, and arrived in time to receive Hilda and her chaperon, who had posted from Launceston to Trevenna. It was a delicious autumn day, and after the cottage had been inspected and approved, the lovers wandered about the wild crest of Tintagel, utterly happy in each other's company, while that discreet spinster, Miss Meyerstein, sat on a grassy bank in the valley below, absorbed in a strip of soft cotton knitting, intended to form part and parcel

of a counterpane, which great work had been in progress for the past ten years.

Bothwell was the bearer of a letter from Dora, entreating Hilda to go to her at the Manor, and stay there until Heathcote's return. Bothwell was to stay at Trevenna meanwhile and set the builders at work upon his improvements. The old cottage and the land about it had been secured on a lease for three lives, Bothwell being one, Hilda another, and one of the twins the third. Bothwell hoped to be able to buy the place long before any of these lives gave out.

"You and I have so much to arrange and talk about" (wrote Mrs. Wyllard). "Your furniture, your linen, your *trousseau*. I venture to think I am your nearest friend, and the person you would be most likely to consult in these matters. Your presence will comfort me, dear, and hinder me from dwelling too exclusively on my great trouble. Julian too, will be glad to have you in the house, and to hear your songs sometimes of an evening. He has his good days and his bad days, poor darling, and there are times when he is cheerful and likes company. Do you come to me at once, Hilda. I am sure you must be tired of Dawlish by this time. It is a very nice little place, but I can imagine a limit to its attractions; and the season is rather late for your favorite diversion of swimming. You shall be free to return to the Spaniards when your brother comes back to England, but in the meantime I am sure I want you more than Miss Meyerstein, who has those all-absorbing twins to occupy her cares and thoughts. I shall expect you the day after to-morrow, by the afternoon train. I shall send a carriage to meet you. Yours, lovingly,

DORA WYLLARD."

What could Hilda say to such an invitation from one who had been to her as an elder sister, and whom she loved as fondly as ever sister was loved? She wrote to Dora at the hotel where they lunched and took tea, and gave her letter for Bothwell to carry.

"You are going to Penmorval," he said.

"Yes, I am going there the day after to-morrow."

"And I am to be banished. I am to stay here and see that my plans are carried out properly. I dare say my cousin thinks that if I were to stay at Penmorval while you are there, I should forget all the serious business of life, lapse into a rapturous idiocy of love. Well, I am too happy to complain. I shall watch every brick that is laid, every timber that is sawn. You shall not have a badly baked brick or a plank of green wood in your house. I shall think of the plans night and day, dream of them—leap out of my sleep in the dead of the night to make some improvement."

"If you chop and change too much you will have dear to pay," said Miss Meyerstein; and then she launched into a long story about a German grand duke, with an unpronounceable name, who built himself a summer palace which cost three times as much as he intended, because of his serene highness's artistic temperament, which had led him into continual tampering with the plans.

Never before in his life had Bothwell felt happier than on that breezy September day, pottering about around the old cottage on the

hill-side, planning the house and gardens of the future—the study, the drawing-room, the ingle nook in the dining-room, the little entrance-hall which would hardly be more than a lobby, the closets and clever contrivances, and shelves and cozy nooks, which were to make this house different from all other houses—at least in the eye of its possessor—the quaint old lattices which were to be retained in all their primitive simplicity, and still quainter casements which were to be added—here an oriel and there a bow—an early English chimney-stack on one side and a distinctly Flemish porch on the other. Bothwell could draw well enough to show the builder what he wanted done. He had his pocket-book full of sketches for chimneys, pediments, doors and windows, and ornamental ventilators.

"One would think you were going to build a town," said the practical Fraulein.

Never had Bothwell been happier than he felt as he rode across the moors in the fading daylight, thinking of the day that was over. What a simple, domestic day it had been—so homely, so tranquil, so sweet, ending with the cozy tea-drinking in the parlor at the inn, Hilda presiding at the tea-tray, and as self possessed as if she and Bothwell had been married for ten years. The time of tremors and agitations was passed. They were secure in each other's love, secure in the consent and approval of those who loved them. Henceforward their lives were to drift calmly on a summer sea.

How different was this newer and purer love of his from the old passion, with its alternations of fever and remorse. How different his simple-minded sweetheart of to-day—gentle, unselfish, conscientious, religious—from the woman who had been all exaction and caprice; insatiable in her desire for admiration, self indulgent, luxurious, caring not a jot how the world outside her own boudoir went on, who suffered, or who was glad, provided her wishes were gratified and her vanity fed.

It was dinner time when Bothwell arrived at Penmorval, and the dinner hour was of all seasons the most melancholy, now that the master of the house was a helpless invalid in the upper floor, perhaps never again to enter that stately dining-room, where the butler insisted upon serving Bothwell's dinner in just as slow and ceremonial a manner as if family and guests had been assembled in full force.

Vainly did Bothwell plead against this ceremony.

"I wish you would ask them to cook me a chop, Stodden," he said, "a chop and a potato would be ample. I hate a long dinner at any time, but most especially when I am to eat it alone. You need not take so much trouble as you do about me."

But Stodden ascribed all such speeches to overweening modesty on Mr. Grahame's part. The poor young man knew that he was in somewise an interloper, and he did not wish to give trouble. It was a proper feeling on his part, and Stodden was resolved that he should not be a loser by his modesty. Stodden gave him an even handsomer dinner on the following day, and when remonstrated with smiled the smile of incredulity.

"Lor, sir, you know you like a good dinner," he said. "You mayn't wish to give trouble, but you must like a good dinner. We all like a good dinner. It's human nature."

After this Bothwell felt that remonstrance was useless.

Mrs. Wyllard dined with her invalid husband. She rarely left him except when he was sleeping under the influence of morphia, or when he asked to be alone. There were hours in his long and weary day in which even his wife's presence seemed a burden to him, and when he preferred to fight the battle in solitude.

Upon this particular evening of Bothwell's return from Trevenna his cousin joined him at the dinner table, an unexpected pleasure.

"I want to hear all the news, Bothwell," she said. "Julian is asleep, and I have half an hour free."

Bothwell told his news gladly, gayly.

"She is coming the day after to-morrow," he said, "and I am to be banished, like Romeo. But I am not afraid of Romeo's ill luck. You won't give my Juliet a sleeping potion and bury her alive while I am away, will you? I have taken two rooms in a cottage at Trevenna, with an old goody who is to do for me. That will be ever so much cheaper than the inn; and you know that in my position I ought to be economical."

"You ought not to make yourself uncomfortable for the sake of a few pounds."

"Ah, that is your spendthrift's argument. He never can understand that he ought to save a few pounds, and so he dies a pauper, while the man who has a proper respect for pounds—and pence, even—blossoms into a millionaire. I shall be very comfortable with my goody. I shall be out all day, superintending the builder. I shall live upon chops and porter, and I shall sleep like a top every night, in a dear little bedroom smelling of lavender. My goody is clean to a fault. She cast an evil eye at my boots as I went upstairs. All the articles of furniture in her rooms are veiled with crochet work, as if the wood were too precious to be exposed to the light. But how grave you are looking, Dora. Has Wyllard been any worse to-day?"

"No, he has been much the same—a sad monotony of suffering. It was of you I was thinking, Bothwell. I saw some news in the county paper which I know will grieve you."

"There has been no accident between Launceston and Dawlish, has there?" gasped Bothwell, starting up from his chair; "the train got back all right—"

"You foolish boy! If there had been an accident, how do you suppose I could hear of it?" exclaimed his cousin, smiling at his vehemence. "How like a lover to imagine that any ill news must needs be about your betrothed, though you only left her three hours ago. No, Bothwell, my bad news concerns an old friend of yours, General Harborough."

"What of General Harborough?" asked Bothwell, anxiously.

"The announcement of his death is in the county paper."

"His death? Impossible! Why, I met him less than ten days ago. He seemed hale and hearty as ever."

"He caught a severe cold at the funeral of a friend, and died of bronchitis. Poor Bothwell! I can sympathize with your sorrow for so stanch a friend. I have often heard you say how good he was to you in India."

Dora had heard of General Harborough only as an Indian friend

of her cousin's. She knew of Lady Valeria's existence, and that was all. No rumor of Bothwell's flirtation with that lady had ever reached her ears. She did not know that Bothwell's frequent journeys to Plymouth had been on Lady Valeria's account; that his mysterious journeys to London had been made in her interests —troublesome journeys to interview Jew money-lenders, to renew bills and tide over difficulties.

And now Valeria was a widow, and would have been able to exact the fulfillment of old vows, breathed under tropical stars, far away in that Eastern land which they had both loved. She would have been able to claim him as her slave if he had not boldly broken his fetters the other day.

"Thank God I delayed no longer," he said to himself; "thank God I got my release before this happened."

And then he thought sadly, affectionately, of his old friend; and he remembered with thankfulness that last meeting—that farewell grasp of the good man's hand, which he had been able to return as honestly as it was given.

"Why did I ever sin against him?" he asked himself. "What an arrant sneak I must have been."

"You will go to General Harborough's funeral, I suppose?" said Dora presently.

"Yes, of course I must be at the funeral. When does it take place?"

"To-morrow."

"Yes, I should go without doubt. I shall join the procession at the cemetery. As I am not invited there will be no need for me to go to the house."

"I suppose not. The poor widow will feel the blow terribly, no doubt."

"Yes, I have no doubt she will be sorry."

This was not a lie. Bothwell thought that even Valeria could not fail to feel some touch of sorrow for the loss of that chivalrous friend and benefactor, the man who had given so much, and had received so poor a return for his gifts. There would be the anguish of a guilty conscience, even if there were no other form of sorrow.

"But, as I suppose she is elderly too, perhaps she will not survive him very long," pursued Dora, infinitely compassionate for the woes of a broken-hearted widow.

"Lady Valeria elderly!" exclaimed Bothwell. "She is not thirty."

"What, was your good General Harborough so foolish as to marry a girl?"

"Yes. It was the only foolishness of his life that I have ever heard of; and he was so good to the woman he married that he might be pardoned for his folly."

"I hope she was fond of him, and worthy of him?"

Bothwell did not enter upon the question, and his reticence about Lady Valeria Harborough struck Dora as altogether at variance with his natural frankness. And then she remembered that unexplained entanglement with a married woman—and it flashed upon her that Lady Valeria might be the heroine of that story. He had spoken of General Harborough, but never of General Harborough's wife.

There had been a studied reserve upon that subject. And now Dora discovered that Valeria Harborough was a young woman.

The invitation to the funeral came by next morning's post—a formal invitation sent by a fashionable firm of undertakers—and Bothwell had no excuse for staying away from the Villa, where the mourners were to assemble at three o'clock in the afternoon. He had no fear that Lady Valeria would be present upon such an occasion: but there was just the possibility that she might send for him when she knew he was in the house. She had always been reckless of conventionalities, carrying matters with such a high hand as to defy slander.

His heart sunk within him as he approached the classic portico of the Villa. Deepest regret for his dead benefactor, deepest remorse for having wronged him, weighed down his heart as he entered the darkened house, where rooms built for brightness and gayety looked all the more gloomy in the day of mourning. The hall was hung with black, and in the midst stood the plain oak coffin draped with the colors which the general had fought for fifty years before amid the wild hills of Afghanistan. Crosses and wreaths of purest white were heaped upon the coffin, and the atmosphere of the darkened hall was heavy with the perfume of stephanotis and tuberose, those two flowers which the general had always associated with his wife, who rarely decorated herself or her rooms with any other exotics.

Bothwell stood amid the mourning crowd with heavily-beating heart. There was no summons from Lady Valeria, and he heard some one near him telling some one else that her grief was terrible, a stony, silent grief, which alarmed her people and her medical attendant. She would see no one. Lady Lostwithiel had come all the way from Baden, where the poor dear earl was doctoring his gout, but Lady Valeria had only consented to see her mother for half an hour, and poor Lady Lostwithiel had not even been asked to stay at the Villa. She had been obliged to put up at an hotel, which was a cruelty, as every one knew that the Lostwithiels were as poor as church mice.

"Perhaps Lady Valeria has not forgiven her family for having sold her," said the second speaker, in the same confidential voice.

"Sold her. Nothing of the kind. She adored the old general."

"You had better tell that to—another regiment," muttered his friend, as Bothwell moved away from the group.

It was past five before the funeral was over, and there was no train for Bodmin till seven, so Bothwell strolled into the coffee-room of the Duke of Cornwall and ordered a cup of tea.

While he was drinking it he was joined by a young officer who had been at the funeral, and whom Bothwell had often met at Harborough Villa—quite a youth, beardless, and infantine of aspect, but with a keen desire to appear older than his years. He affected to have steeped himself in iniquity, to have dishonored more households and fleeced more tradesmen than any man in the service. He hinted that his father had thrust him out of doors, and that his mother had died of a broken heart on his account. He was a youth who loved gossip, and who went about among all the wives and spinsters of Plymouth, the dowagers and old ladies, disseminating

tittle-tattle. Hardly anything he said was true, hardly anybody believed him; but people liked to hear him talk all the same. There was a piquancy in slander uttered by those coral lips, which had not long finished with the corals of babyhood.

"My dear Bothwell, what a tragedy!" he exclaimed, as he seated himself in front of a brandy and soda.

"It is a sad loss for every one," Bothwell answered, tritely.

"Sad loss: but, my dear fellow, what a scandal! Everybody in Plymouth is talking about it. There has been hardly anything else spoken of at any of the dinners I have been at during the last ten days."

"I thought old maids' tea-parties were your usual form," retorted Bothwell, with a sneer. "What is your last mare's nest, Falkner? The general's death, or the general's funeral?"

"The circumstances that preceded the dear old man's death—that's the scandal. Surely you must have heard—"

"Consider that I have been buried among the Cornish moors, and have heard nothing."

"By Jove! Do you mean to say that you don't know there was a dreadful row one night at the Villa? Sir George Mildmay insulted Lady Valeria—called her some foul name, accused her of carrying on with a young man. The general came up at the moment, and smashed his head. Sir George went all over the place next day abusing my lady—sent the general a summons to the police-court, where the whole story must have come out *in extenso*, as those newspaper fellows say. A very ugly story it is—betting transactions, borrowed money, and a lover in the background. An uncommonly queer story, my dear Grahame. Plymouth was on the *qui vive* for a tremendous scandal. You know what these garrison and dockyard towns are, and a man in the general's position is a mark for scandal. The thing was altogether too awful, and the poor old general wouldn't face it. He wouldn't face it, old chap, and he died."

"You mean to say that he—"

"I mean to say nothing. There was no inquest. The poor old man kept his bed for a week, and the cause of death was called bronchitis, but there are people I know who have their own idea about the general's death, and a very ugly idea it is."

"Your friends have a *penchant* for ugly ideas, Falkner," answered Bothwell, coolly.

He did not believe a word of the subaltern's story, and yet the thought of it troubled him as he sat alone in his corner of the smoking carriage, trying to solace himself with a pipe, trying to think only of the girl he loved and of his brightening prospects.

The mention of a lover, how much or how little did it mean? Could it be true that General Harborough had knocked a man down in his own house? Such an act on the part of the most chivalrous of men must have been the result of extraordinary provocation. Only a deliberate insult to a woman could excuse such an outrage against the laws of hospitality. He remembered that Lady Valeria had talked of borrowing money from Sir George Mildmay, and what could she expect but insult if she placed herself under obligations to a notorious *roué*. He had warned her of the folly of such

a course. He had urged her to confide in her husband. And now that good and loyal friend and protector was gone, and this last act of his wife's had left her to face the world with a tainted reputation.

He told himself that there must be some grain of truth in the subaltern's story. The scandal too nearly touched actual facts which were known to Bothwell to be altogether false.

"God help her if her good name is at the mercy of such a scoundrel as Mildmay," thought Bothwell.

He left Penmorval in a dog-cart next morning, carrying his portmanteau and a box of books at the back. He was to have the use of the dog-cart and Glencoe while he stayed at Trevenna, so that he should not feel himself altogether banished. He could ride over to Penmorval occasionally.

"You must not come too often, mind," said Dora when she was bidding him good-by. "Indeed, on reflection, I think you had better only come when you are invited. You may have no discretion otherwise. It will not do for you to be really living here and only pretending to live at Trevanna."

"It is unkind of you to suggest that a man must be an utter imbecile because he is in love, Dora," remonstrated Bothwell. "Of course I understand that I am sent away as a sacrifice to the proprieties. I am banished in order that Mrs. Grundy may be satisfied—that same Mrs. Grundy who was willing to suspect me of murder on the very smallest provocation. No, my dear Dora, I am not going to be troublesome. I will only come when I have your permission. I suppose I may come next Sunday?"

"Oh, Bothwell, this is Wednesday; Sunday is *very* near."

"It will seem ages off to me. Yes, I shall certainly come on Sunday. Even servants are allowed to go and see their friends on the Sabbath. Is your cousin less than a hireling that he should be denied? I shall ride over in time for breakfast on Sunday morning."

"You will have to get up at six o'clock."

"What of that? I have had to get up at four, and even at half-past three, for cub-hunting."

He arrived at Trevenna early in the afternoon, settled himself comfortably in his cottage lodgings, and arranged his books in a corner of the neat little parlor, with its superabundant crochet-work and crockery, which ornamentation he artfully persuaded his landlady to put away in a cupboard during his residence.

"Men are so clumsy," he pleaded. "They always spoil things."

Goody confessed that the male sex was inherently awkward, and had an incapacity to appreciate crochet antimacassars. She sighed as she denuded her best parlor of its beauties. "The place dew look so bare," she said.

Bothwell gave up his afternoon to a long interview with the builder, who was a smart young man, and as honest as he was smart. The old cottage was thoroughly overhauled and inspected, with a view to the carrying out of those extensions and improvements which Bothwell had planned for himself, and for which he had made drawings which were very creditable to an amateur architect. His experience as an engineer stood him in good stead.

He modified his plans somewhat on the advice of the smart young

builder, but the alterations were to be carried out very much upon his own original lines—the builder's modifications were chiefly in detail. And then they had to fight out the question of time. The builder asked for six months; Bothwell would only grant four. Finally, time, cost—everything was agreed upon, Bothwell having given up his original idea of being his own builder and buying his own materials, and the contract was to be taken to Camelford next day to be put into legal form. For three hundred and fifty pounds the old cottage was to be transformed into a comfortable house. The two little parlors and the kitchen were to be made into three studies or bookrooms, communicating with each other. These were for Bothwell and his pupils to work in. A new drawing-room and dining room were to be built, and over these two good bedrooms.

"I shall add a billiard-room and a large nursery over it later on, when I am beginning to make my fortune," thought Bothwell. "I know we shall want a billiard-room, and I hope we shall want a nursery."

The builder had gone home to his young wife and baby, in a cheerful red brick cottage of his own construction, and Bothwell was pacing the old neglected garden alone in the autumn sunset, when he looked up suddenly and saw a dark figure standing in the narrow path between him and the rosy western sky.

It was the tall, slender figure of a woman, robed in black and thickly veiled. That black figure seemed to shut out all the warmth and beauty of the glowing west. Bothwell's heart grew cold within him at sight of it.

He had not a moment's doubt or hesitation, though the woman's face was hardly visible under the thick crape veil.

"Valeria," he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is Valeria."

"How, in the name of all that's reasonable, did you come here?"

"A pair of post-horses brought me. That was easy enough when I knew where to find you. I heard at Bodmin Road Station that you were here. You had been seen to drive by, and you told the station-master where you were going."

CHAPTER XX.

TWO WOMEN.

THEY stood face to face in the evening light; they two who had once loved each other, who had once been wont to meet with smiles and gladness, hand clasped in hand—they stood pale and silent, each waiting for the other to speak.

"How could you do so mad a thing as to come here, Lady Valeria?" Bothwell asked at last.

His heart was beating passionately, not with love, but with anger. He was indignant at the unfeminine feeling shown by this pursuit of him, this persecution of a man who had frankly owned a new and wiser attachment.

"It is not the first madness I have been guilty of for your sake," she answered. "There was the madness of loving you in the first

instance, and the still greater madness of being constant to you, even when I suspected that you had grown tired of me. But it was not weariness of me that influenced you, was it, Bothwell? It was the false position which grew irksome; the falsehood toward that good, brave man. It was that which made you desert me, was it not, Bothwell? That is all over now. My bondage is over. I am my own mistress, answerable to no one for my conduct, and I am here to remind you of old vows made three years ago beside the fountain at Simla."

"Those old vows have been canceled, Lady Valeria," said Bothwell, coldly. "Surely you have not forgotten our last parting, and the old love-token which you threw away."

"I was beside myself with anger," she answered, hurriedly. "You could not have meant all you said that day, Bothwell. You wanted to escape from a false position; you could not guess that my release was to come so soon, that in less than a month I should be free, that in a year I might be your wife."

"Stop," he cried, "for pity's sake; not another word. I am engaged to marry another woman—bound heart and soul to another. I have no other purpose in life but to win her and to be happy with her."

Lady Valeria looked at him in silence for some moments. She had thrown back her veil when she first addressed him. Her face was almost as white as the crape border of her widow's bonnet, but on each cheek there was one spot of hectic—a spot that looked like flame—and in her eyes there was the light of furious anger.

"It is true, then! You are in love with another woman?"

"It is true. I am in love with her, and I am bound to her by all those feelings which are sweetest and most sacred in the mind of a man—by gratitude, by love, by respect, by adoration of her noble qualities. I am to be married to her almost immediately. You can understand, therefore, Lady Valeria, that as I hope always to be your friend, your champion and defender, if need of championship should ever arise, I am justified in remonstrating with you for your folly in coming here alone, upon the day after your husband's funeral."

"My champion, my friend," she repeated mockingly. "What amazing generosity, what sublime chivalry! You offer me your friendship—you who swore to be my husband, to give me the devotion of your life, whenever it pleased God to set me free from an unnatural union. You who were bound to me by the most sacred vows!"

"You released me from those vows when you threw away the love-token. I asked you for my freedom, and you told me that I was free. You can not recall that release, Lady Valeria."

"I released you from a false position. That is over now; and your alleged motive—your compunction—your remorse of conscience—must be over too."

Bothwell was silent. He had said all that could be said. He stood before Lady Valeria motionless, dumb, ready to bear the brunt of her anger and submit meekly to her reproaches, were they ever so ungenerous.

"Do you know what you have done for me?" she demanded,

passionately. "Do you know what you have cost me—you who pretended to be my slave, who pretended to worship me, and whose flimsy passion could not stand the wear and tear of three short years? You have blighted my life; you have ruined my good name."

"That last charge can not be true, Lady Valeria. You were much too careful of your reputation—you knew much too well how to keep your slave at a proper distance," answered Bothwell, with a touch of scorn.

"But I did not know how to hide my love for you. There were eyes keen enough to read that. Do you know that my husband assaulted Sir George Mildmay in his own house on my account?"

"Ah, then, the story was true?" muttered Bothwell.

"You have heard about it, I see. Did you hear the nature of the insult which provoked that punishment?"

"No."

"It was the mention of your name—your name flung in my face like an accusation—cast at me as if my position were notorious—as if all society knew that there had been an intrigue between us."

"Sir George is a blackguard, and no act of his would surprise me; but Sir George is not society. You need not be unhappy about any speech of his. If you want me to call him out, I am quite willing to go over to Blankenburg and ask him to meet me there."

"You know that such an act as that would intensify the scandal. No, Bothwell, there is only one way in which you can set me right a year hence, when my year of widowhood is over, when I can marry again without disrespect to my husband's memory. That is the only way of setting me right with the world, Bothwell; and it is the only way of setting me right in my own self-esteem."

"My dear Lady Valeria, I wonder that you have not learned to understand society better, you who are essentially a woman of society. Do you think the world would applaud you or respect you for making a very poor marriage—for uniting yourself to a man without pursuit, or means, or position? You, who with beauty, rank, and wealth, might marry almost any one you pleased. The world does not smile on such marriages, Lady Valeria. The world worships the star which rises higher in the social firmament—not the star which bends earthward. You have your future before you, free and unfettered. You have wealth, which in this age means power. You can have nothing to regret in a foolish love of the past, which drooped and died for want of a congenial atmosphere."

"Is that your last word upon this subject?" asked Valeria, looking at him intently with those angry eyes.

They were beautiful, even in anger, those violet-dark eyes, but the light in them was a diabolical light, as of an evil spirit.

"My very last."

"Then we will say no more, and we will enter upon a new phase of our existence—the period of friendship. Perhaps you will be kind enough to take me back to the inn where I left my carriage, and order some tea for me?"

"I shall be very happy," said Bothwell, quietly, and they walked off toward the inn, which was less than half a mile from the cottage.

"May I ask what you were doing in that deserted garden?" inquired Lady Valeria.

"I have been planning the improvement of my future home."

"Indeed. You are going to live in that desolate spot, with nothing but the sea and the sky to look at?"

"The sea and the sky, and some of the finest coast scenery in England—the sands, and the rocks, and the wild hills. Don't you think that ought to be enough for any man to look at?"

"For a hermit, no doubt, not for a man. A man should have the city and the Forum. Ah, Bothwell, if you were my husband there would be no limit to my ambition for you. And you are going to vegetate in a place like this?"

"I am going to work here, and to be more useful in my generation, I hope. I shall help to make the soldiers of the future," and then he told Lady Valeria his plans.

"What a drudgery," she exclaimed, "what a wearisome, monotonous round, from year's end to year's end. I would as soon be a horse in a mill. Oh, Bothwell, the very idea is an absurdity. You a school-master! You!"

She measured him from head to foot with a scornful laugh, trying to humiliate him, to make him ashamed of his modest hopes. But she failed utterly in this endeavor. Bothwell was too happy to be easily put out of conceit with his prospects. Even that opprobrious name of "school-master" had no terrors for him.

"Tell me about my friend's last illness," he said, presently, gravely, gently, trying to bring Lady Valeria to a more womanly frame of mind.

He thought that she must surely have some touch of tenderness, some regret for the husband who had been so good and loyal in his treatment of her; the man to whom she had been as an indulged and idolized daughter, rather than as a wife; escaping all wifely servitude, seeking her own pleasure in all things, allowed to live her own life.

Lady Valeria told Bothwell about those last sad days, how the strong frame had been burned up with fever, the broad chest racked with pain, how patiently weakness and suffering had been endured.

"He was a brave, good man," she said; "noble, unselfish to the last. His parting words were full of love and generosity. 'You will marry again,' he said. 'I have left no fetter upon your life. My latest prayer will be for your happiness.'"

"I wish we had both been better worthy of his regard," said Bothwell, gloomily.

He wondered at the supreme egotism of a nature which could be so little moved by this good man's death.

"That is past wishing now. Nothing that you or I can do will cancel the past. No, Bothwell," she said, looking at him steadily, "nothing will cancel the past."

They were at the hotel by this time. Bothwell ordered tea, then went out to the stables to order the carriage. He left Lady Valeria to take her tea in mournful solitude, while he walked up and down in front of the hotel, waiting to hand her into her carriage He was indignant with her for the unwomanly step she had taken. He wondered that he could ever have cared for such a woman—a woman who could assume the dignified airs of an empress, and yet stoop to follies at which a dress-maker's apprentice might have hesi-

tated—a creature of caprice and impulse, governed by no higher law than her own whim.

He walked up and down in the autumn darkness, listening to the murmur of the waves, seeing the stars shine out, pale and far apart in the calm gray—glancing now and then at the window of the sitting-room, where Lady Valeria was seated in the glow of the fire, a somber figure in densest black

She came out after the carriage had been waiting some time.

"Oh! you are there, are you?" she exclaimed, seeing Bothwell by the carriage door. "I thought you had gone."

"I waited to hand you to your carriage."

"You are vastly polite. I was hardly prepared for so much attention."

"There is a train from Bodmin Road few minutes after nine. You will be in time for it if your coachman drives pretty fast."

"The road is not the safest in the world for fast driving; but you can tell him to catch the train, if you please. Good-night."

Bothwell told the coachman not to waste his time when he had a level road; and as the habit of Cornish coachmen is to spring their horses up hill and canter them gayly down hill, there was every chance that Lady Valeria would be in time.

The carriage drove off, and Bothwell went back to his cottage lodgings, wondering whether he had seen the last of the lady. Her coming had introduced a new element of doubt and fear into his mind. A woman capable of such foolishness might stop at no desperate act. All the serenity of Bothwell's sky had become clouded over.

He turned his face in the direction of Penmorval, and looked across the hills, through the cool, dark night. Oh, what a different nature that was, the nature of the girl who was to be his wife; what rest, what comfort in the very thought of her love.

"God bless you, my darling," he said to himself. "I send my love and blessing to you, dearest, over the quiet hills, under the silent stars."

CHAPTER XXI.

ROSES ON A GRAVE.

WHILE Bothwell was watching the builder's men upon the green hill beside the Atlantic, Edward Heathcote was slowly, patiently, laboriously following the thin thread of circumstantial evidence which was to lead him to the solution of Leonie Lemarque's fate. He had taken this task upon himself in purest chivalry, an uncongenial duty, entered upon in unselfish devotion to the woman he loved. He pursued it now with a passionate zest, a morbid interest, which was a new phase in his character. Never had he followed the doublings of some cunning old fox across the moors and heaths of his native land with such intensity as he followed that unknown murderer of Leonie Lemarque. That she had been murdered—deliberately sacrificed—as the one witness of a past crime, was now his conviction. He had ceased to waver between two opinions. Leonie had gone to meet the murderer of her aunt, and she had

fallen a victim to the folly of the dying woman who had sent her to seek pity and protection from such a source.

Who was that murderer, and for what reason had he carried his helpless prey to a remote Cornish valley? Why should he not have tried to get rid of her in the great wilderness of London, where the crime would have excited much less curiosity, and would have been less likely to be discovered?

Entering deliberately into the thoughts of the assassin, following out the workings of his mind, his fears, his calculations, his artifices, it seemed to Heathcote that a man familiar with the line between Plymouth and Penzance might scheme out just such a murder as that which had been committed; might fix on the very spot at which the deed was to be done, knowing that at that particular point the palisades had been removed, and the viaduct left unprotected. He would believe that the fall of a strange girl at such a spot would be accepted as purely accidental. He would trust to his own cleverness for disconnecting himself from the catastrophe; he would imagine that in the hurry and confusion following such an event it would be impossible for the murderer to be identified. Who was to select from all the travelers in a train that one traveler whose arm had thrust the girl to her doom? A little cleverness and watchfulness on his part would render such identification impossible. A man provided with a railway key could get from one carriage to another easily enough in the surprise and horror of the moments following immediately upon the girl's fall. Few men are quite masters of their senses during such moments: and all eyes would be turned toward the gorge at the bottom of which the girl was lying: everyone's thought would be as to whether she was living or dead. Very easy in such a moment for an active man to pass from one carriage to the other, unobserved by any creature on or about the train.

Mr. Blumenlein's remark about the hidden door in the alcove had impressed Heathcote strongly; the door opening into a dark and obscure court; a narrow passage piercing from one street to another, and with only a side door here and there leading into a yard, and here and there the grated windows of a warehouse or an office; an alley in which, after business hours, there were hardly any signs of human habitation. Heathcote inspected this passage after he left the merchant's office. He followed it to its outlet into a narrow street which led him into another and busier street parallel with the Rue Lafitte. A curious fancy possessed him, and he made his way, by narrow and obscure streets, behind the Grand Opera and the Grand Hotel, into the Rue Lafitte. By this way, which was somewhat circuitous, and which led for the most part through shabby streets, he avoided the Boulevard altogether.

That speech of Mr. Blumenlein's haunted him like the refrain of a song. The words repeated themselves over and over again in his mind with maddening reiteration.

"Wyllard, the speculator, was one man; but there was another man of whom the world knew nothing, and who went out and came in between dusk and dawn by that side door in the court."

It was a bold speculation on the part of the German merchant, and might have very little foundation in reality, yet the fact that such a side door had been made at Julian Wyllard's expense implied

a desire for independent egress and ingress, a wish to be free from the curiosity of porters and porters' wives, to go out and come in unobserved, to have no comment made upon the hours he kept.

For such a man as Wyllard had appeared in the eyes of the world, for a hard-hearted plodder, a money-making machine, this easy access to the Boulevard and the pleasures of a Parisian midnight would have been useless.

But for a man who led a double life, who was the hard calculating man of business by day, and who at night took his revenge for the toil and dullness of the money-grubber's career in the wildest dissipations of the greatest city in the world; for such a man the facility afforded by the side door in the court would be invaluable.

Had Wyllard been such a man? Had Wyllard lived a double life during the ten years of his Parisian existence?

Such a thing seemed to the last degree unlikely. Difficult to suppose that he could have given his nights to pleasure and folly, he who had succeeded as a foreigner in a field where so many had failed—he who had penetrated the innermost labyrinths of the financial world, and had always been a winner in the hazardous game where the reckless and the idle must inevitably end as losers—he who had the *flair* for successful enterprises which had been spoken of to Heathcote as little short of inspiration, he who had been respected by the cleverest men on the Paris Bourse, honored and revered as the hardest worker and keenest thinker among them all. No, such a man could not have given his nights to pleasure—could not have rioted among foolish revelers betwixt midnight and morning—to go back to his den in the early dawn, and to begin a new day, half rested, bemused by wine and folly.

No, such a man could not have habitually lived the Boulevard life, could not have been the associate of fools and light women. He could not so have lived without the fact of his folly being known to everybody in Paris. And Edward Heathcote had heard his rival praised for the sobriety and steadiness of his life, wondered at as a miracle of industry and good conduct, a man of one idea and one ambition. He had heard Julian Wyllard so spoken of by men who knew their Paris. He had heard his character discussed and sifted years ago, at the time of his marriage with Dora Dalmaine.

That Julian Wyllard could have lived a wild and rowdy life was impossible; but that theory of a double life did not necessarily imply dissipation or folly. What of a man who concealed from the world his inner life, the life of passion and emotion, who abandoned himself in secretness and obscurity to his all-absorbing love for a woman whom he dared not acknowledge before society? Such a man might verily be said to lead a double life—and Julian Wyllard might have been such a man.

Heathcote looked at his watch when he entered the Rue Lafitte. He had walked the distance in a quarter of an hour.

He had made a note of the number of the house in which Marie Prévol had lived. It was 117, about half-way between the Boulevard and Lafayette. It was to this house that he now directed his steps, impelled by the desire to see the rooms in which the beautiful young actress had lived—if it were possible to see them. In this dead season, when so many of the residents of Paris were absent,

there was just the chance that some good-natured concierge—and the concierge is always amenable to the gentle inducement of a five-franc piece—might consent to admit a respectable-looking stranger to a view of the third floor of number 117.

The house was a quiet reputable-looking house enough—one of the older and smaller houses of the street, untouched by the hand of improvement, and of somewhat shabby appearance externally.

The person who opened the door, and who occupied a little den at the back of the entrance hall, was a woman of about forty, cleaner and fresher-looking than the generality of portresses and caretakers. She was decently attired in a smart cotton gown, which fitted her buxom figure to perfection. Her face was clean, and her cap spotless. She had a pleasant, open countenance, and Heathcote felt that he might believe anything she told him.

He asked if there were any apartments to be let in the house.

No, the portress told him. There were only old-established families living there. There had not been a floor to let for three years.

"Indeed! Not the third floor, for example?"

"No. But why did monsieur inquire especially about the third floor?" the portress asked, looking at him keenly with her bright, black eyes.

"I confess to having a particular curiosity about the third floor," replied Heathcote, judging that frankness would serve him best with this outspoken matron, "and if by any chance the family were absent—"

"Monsieur would like to indulge a morbid curiosity," interrupted the portress; "to see the rooms which were occupied by a beautiful woman who was murdered. There was a time when I had twenty, forty, fifty such applications in a day, when all the idlers in Paris came here to spy about and to question. If the murder had been done in one of those very rooms instead of in the wood, I should have made my fortune. As it was, people stared and pried and touched things, as if the very curtains and sofa cushions had been steeped in blood. But that was ten years ago. I wonder that monsieur should feel any curiosity after all those years."

"You were living in this house, ten years ago, at the time of the murder?" questioned Heathcote, eagerly.

"Yes, monsieur, and for three years before that I was with Madame Georges from the day she first entered this house to the day she was carried out of it in her coffin. I am Barbe Leroux, born Girot. If you have heard of the murder of Marie Prévol you must have heard of Barbe Girot, her servant. I was one of the chief witnesses before the *Juge d'Instruction*," concluded the portress, with obvious pride.

"Madame, I have read your evidence," replied Heathcote. "I am deeply interested in the history of that terrible murder, and I rejoice in having met a lady who can, if she pleases, help me to unravel a mystery which baffled the police."

"The police!" exclaimed Mme. Leroux, contemptuously. "The police are a parcel of no great things, or they would have found the man who killed my mistress and Monsieur de Maucroix in a week."

"Provided that he stopped in Paris to be found. But it seems

evident that he got away from Paris, and instantly, or he would have been taken red-handed."

"I have reason to know that he was in Paris long after the murder," said Barbe, decisively.

"What reason? Pray consider, madame, that I am brought to this house by no idle curiosity, no morbid love of the horrible. It is my mission to discover the murderer of Marie Prévol. Give me your confidence, I entreat, madame. You who loved your mistress must desire to see her assassin punished."

Barbe Leroux shrugged her shoulders with an air of doubt.

"I don't quite know that, monsieur. Yes, I loved my mistress, but I pity her murderer. Come, we can not talk in this passage all day. Will you walk into my room, monsieur, and seat yourself for a little while; and then, if you are anxious to see the rooms in which that poor lady lived, it may perhaps be managed."

"You are very good," said Heathcote, slipping a Napoleon in Barbe Leroux's broad palm.

Had it been half a Napoleon she would have considered herself repaid for ordinary civility, but the larger coin secured extraordinary devotion. She would, in her own phrase, have thrown herself into the fire for this gentlemanly stranger, whose hat and coat were so decidedly English, but who spoke almost as a Parisian.

She ushered him into her little sitting-room, the very sanctuary and stronghold of her domestic life, since there was a bed in a curtained corner, while there was a cradle sunning itself in the few rays of light which crept down the hollow cube of brick and stone along which the single window looked. The *pot au feu* was simmering on a handful of wood ashes in a corner of the hearth; and Madame Leroux's plethoric work-basket showed that she had been lately occupied in the repair of a blue linen blouse.

"Leroux is one of the porters at the Central Markets," she explained. "It is a hard life, and the pay is small; but there are perquisites, and between us we contrive to live and to put away a little for the daughter there," with a nod and a smile in the direction of the cradle, whence came the rhythmical breathing of a fat baby.

"The only one?" inquired Heathcote.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you have lived in this house for thirteen years, Madame Leroux?"

"Nearer fourteen, monsieur, when all is counted. I was a dresser at the Porte Saint Martin, when Mademoiselle Prévol first appeared there. It was a wretched life—bad pay, late hours, hard work. I caught cold from going to and fro on the winter nights, thinly clad; for I had an old mother to support in those days, and I could not afford warm clothing. I had a cough which tore me to pieces, but I dared not give up my employment, and my fear was for being sent away for bad health. I had not a friend in Paris to help me. Then it was, monsieur, that Mademoiselle Prévol took pity on me. She spoke about me to a doctor who used to come behind the scenes and was on friendly terms with all the actors and actresses. She asked him to prescribe for me; but he told her that medicines would be of no use in my case. I was young and had a good constitution. All that was needed for my cure was warmth and comfort. I was

not to go out of doors after dark, or in bad weather, if I wanted to cure myself. I almost laughed at the doctor for his advice. I lived in the Boulevard de la Chapelle, and had to walk to and fro, in all weathers, good or bad. It was January at this time, and the snow was on the ground."

"It was then that Mademoiselle Prévol took you into her service?" speculated Heathcote.

"Yes, monsieur. There are not many ladies in her position who would have cared what became of a drudge like me. She was new to the theater, and she had just become the rage on account of her beauty. The papers had all been full of her praises. Cigars, hats, fans, shoes, were called after her. The public applauded her songs and dances madly every night. Admirers were waiting in crowds at the stage-door to see her leave the theater in the shabby little forty-sous that used to take her home. She dared not walk for fear of being followed and mobbed. She was young enough to have had her head turned by all this fuss; but she seemed to care hardly anything about it. One honest man's love would be worth all this rubbish, she said to me once when I asked her if she was not proud of being the rage with all Paris. I was proud of dressing her, and I used to take the greatest care in everything I did for her, and I suppose it was this that made her so good to me. She knew that I loved her, and the poor dresser's love was honest love. In a word, monsieur, she asked me if I would like to be her servant. She was going to leave her mother's lodgings, where she was not comfortable, and to take an apartment of her own. I might have to work hard, perhaps, she told me, and I should have to be careful and saving, as she had only her salary to live on. She was not like those ladies who drove their carriages and lived in the Bois yonder—but she would feed me and lodge me well, and she would give me as much money as I was getting at the theater, without either food or lodging."

"Naturally, you accepted?"

"With delight, monsieur. And three days after I came to this house. My young mistress had taken the third floor for five years. The landlord put the rooms in order for her, she furnished them very modestly, rather sparely, partly out of her little savings since she had been at the theater, partly on credit. She was to pay so many francs a week to the upholsterer till all was paid for. She had no extravagant tastes, no craving for finery or luxurious living. If you had seen her rooms in those days you might have thought them the rooms of a nun—all things so simple, so neat, so pure."

"But there came a change afterward, I suppose?"

"There came a time when Monsieur Georges loaded her with presents, and the apartment changed gradually under his influence. Easy-chairs, velvet-covered tables, a book-case, an escritoire, satin curtains, rich carpets, pictures, china, hot-house flowers. He showered his gifts upon her; but I knew that she would have been beter pleased to live in her own simple way. She had a horror of seeming like those other ladies of the theater, with their fine houses and fine clothes. She spent very little money on herself; she lived almost as plainly as a workman's wife."

"Was she called Madame Georges when she first came to this house?"

"No, monsieur, she did not even know his name in those days. She only knew that she had a mysterious admirer, who came to the theater every night, who used to sit in a dark corner of a small private box close to the stage, who never showed himself to the audience, and who was always alone. This was all she knew of Monsieur Georges in those days."

"Do you know how their acquaintance advanced from this point?"

"No, monsieur. I hardly know anything of the progress of their attachment. There were letters—gifts—which came to the house. And I know that in the spring nights of that first year my mistress used to walk home from the theater escorted by Monsieur Georges. But he never entered our apartment till after madame's return from England, where she went during the summer vacation. She had been very silent about her strange admirer. She had told me nothing, but she had shed many tears on his account. That was a secret which she could not hide from me. She had spent many wakeful nights, breathed many sighs. When she told me she was going to England, I thought all was over. She had fought hard to be true to herself, poor girl; she had struggled against her fate, but this man's love had conquered her."

"She did not tell you that she was going away to be married?"

"No, monsieur; but when she came back after a fortnight's absence, she showed me her wedding-ring, and she told me that she was to be called Madame Georges henceforward. This I took to mean that Monsieur Georges had married her while in England, and I believe it still. He loved her too well to degrade her by making her his mistress."

"He loved her well enough to murder her," said Heathcote. "I suppose that is about the highest degree of intensity in passion."

"He loved her as women are not often loved, monsieur," replied Barbe, with conviction. "I saw enough to know that from first to last he adored her; that the jealousy which devoured him later, the jealousy which made him act like a madman many times in my hearing, was the madness of intense love. I have listened outside the door, trembling for my mistress's safety, ready to give the alarm to the house, to rush in and rescue her from his violence, and then the storm was lulled by her sweet words, her gentleness, and he became like a penitent child. Yes, monsieur, he loved her as few men love."

"If this were so, why did he keep her in such a dubious, discreditable position? Why did he not introduce her to the world as his wife?"

"I can not tell. There must have been reasons for his secrecy. He seldom came to this house before nightfall.. He never showed himself anywhere with madame till after the theater."

"Since he was rich enough to be lavish, why did he not remove her from the stage?"

"That was one of the causes of unhappiness toward the last, monsieur. It was his wish that she should leave the theater, and she refused. I believe it was at this time she became acquainted with Monsieur de Maucroix."

"You stated before the *Juge d'Instruction* that you believed the acquaintance between your mistress and Monsieur de Maucroix to have been an innocent acquaintance. Is that still your belief?"

"It is my conviction, monsieur. I never doubted my dear mistress's honor, though I doubted her wisdom in allowing herself to think about Monsieur de Maucroix. It must be pleaded in her excuse that he was one of the most fascinating men in Paris. At least that is what I have heard people say of him. I know that he was young, handsome, and remarkably elegant in his appearance."

"And now tell me how you come to know that Georges remained in Paris after the murder? Did you ever see him?"

"Yes, monsieur. It is rather a long story. If I were not afraid of tiring you—" Madame Leroux began deprecatingly.

"You will not tire me. I want to hear every detail, however insignificant."

"Then, monsieur, you must know that in consequence of madame's kindness and of the lavish generosity of Monsieur Georges, and also by reason of a good many gifts from Monsieur de Maucroix, who threw about his money with full hands, I was very comfortably off at the time of madame's sad death. I had buried my poor dead mother two years before, and I had been able to save almost every penny of my wages. I felt, therefore, independent of service. The term would have to be paid by Madame Lemarque, who inherited all her daughter's property, and as she had a horror of the rooms in which her poor daughter had lived, and could not bear to be alone in them for an hour, she asked me to stay till the end of the quarter. Then, as I told you, people came in crowds to see the rooms, and as I had power to show them, or to refuse to show them, just as I pleased, I need not tell you that I made a good deal of money in this way. I did not make a trade in showing the rooms, monsieur. I never asked any one for money, but on the other hand I did not refuse it when it was offered to me. This continued for some weeks; then came the sale. All the handsome articles of furniture, all the pictures and ornaments, fetched high prices. They were bought by fashionable people as souvenirs of the beautiful Marie Prévol. But the plainer furniture, the things which my mistress had paid for out of her own earnings, were sold for very little, and these I bought. I had conferred with the landlord, and he had agreed to retain me as his tenant. With the furniture which I bought at the sale, and with other things which I picked up cheaply among the second-hand dealers, I contrived to make the rooms very comfortable as furnished lodgings, and from that time to this I have carried them on with reasonable profit. Three years later I was able to take the fourth floor, and two years after that, on the second floor falling vacant, I ventured to become tenant for that also. There remains only the first floor, which is let to an old lady of ninety, and if Providence prospers Leroux and me, we ought to be able to take to the first floor by the time the old lady dies."

"You will then be lessees of the whole house; a bold speculation, madame, but one which with your prudent habits will doubtless succeed. But, to return to this man Georges, whom you saw in Paris after the murder."

"I was accustomed to go every week to the Cemetery of Père Lachaise, monsieur, to look at my dear mistress's grave, and to lay my humble offering of flowers upon the plain marble slab which had been placed there at Madame Lemarque's expense. It bore for inscription only one word—Marie. Madame Lemarque dared not describe her daughter as a wife—she would not record her name as a spinster. Marie was enough. For the first month after her burial I found the slab covered with flowers, wreaths, crosses, bouquets of the costliest flowers that can be bought in Paris. I noticed that among the variety of flowers there was one wreath frequently renewed, and always the same—a wreath of Maréchal Niel roses—and I knew that these had been her favorite flowers—the flowers she always wore, and had about her in her rooms. I had often heard her call the Maréchal Niel the king of roses. Months passed, and on my weekly visit with my poor little bunch of violets, or snowdrops, or jonquils, I found always the wreath of yellow roses. All through the winter, when all other tokens had ceased to adorn the grave—when the beautiful actress was beginning to be forgotten—the yellow roses were always renewed. I felt that this could be done only by some one who had devotedly loved her who lay under that marble slab. For her admirers of the theater her death had been a nine days' wonder. They had loaded her grave with flowers in the first enthusiasm of their regret, and then had gone away and forgotten all about her, but the wreath of yellow roses, renewed again and again, all through the long dead winter, was the gift of a steadfast love, a grief which did not diminish with time. I questioned the people at the gates, but they knew nothing of the mysterious hand which laid those flowers on my mistress's grave. I hoped I should some day surprise the visitor who brought them; but although I altered the days of my visits, never going two weeks running on the same day, I seemed no nearer finding out that mysterious mourner. At last, early in the February after my mistress's death, I resolved upon going to the cemetery every day; and remaining there, in view of the grave, as long as my stock of patience would allow me. I spent three or four hours there for six days running, till my heart and my feet were alike weary. But I had seen no one; the roses had not been renewed. The seventh day was a Saturday, the day which I always devoted to cleaning the apartment, which was now in the occupation of an elderly gentleman and his wife. I was not able to leave the house till late in the afternoon. The day had been foggy, and the fog had thickened by the time I left the omnibus, which took me to the Rue de la Roquette. At the gates of the cemetery it was so dark that if I had not been familiar with the paths which led to my mistress's grave, I should hardly have been able to find my way to the spot. The grave is in a narrow side-path, midway between two of the principal walks; and as I turned the corner between two large and lofty monuments, I saw a man standing in the middle of the path in front of Marie Prévol's grave. A tall figure, in a furred overcoat—a figure I knew well. I had not an instant's doubt that the murderer of my mistress stood there before me, looking at his victim's grave."

"Did you accost him?"

"Alas, no. He was not more than a dozen yards from the spot

where I stood, and I quickened my footsteps, intending to speak to him but at the sound of those footsteps he looked round, saw a figure approaching through the fog, and hurried off in the opposite direction. I ran after him, but he had reached the other end of the path before I could overtake him, and when I got there it was in vain that I looked for any trace of him either right or left of the pathway. He had disappeared in the fog, which was thicker at this end of the path, as it was on lower ground. My mistress's grave was on the slope of the hill, and the fog was less dense.

"I went back to the grave and looked at the flowers on the slab. A wreath of yellow roses, fresh from the hot-house where they had been grown, lay on the marble, surrounding that one word 'Marie.'"

"Are you sure that the man you saw was Georges?"

"Perfectly sure. I knew his figure; I knew his walk. I could not be mistaken in him. And who else was there in Paris who would come week after week, in all weathers, to lay the roses my mistress loved upon her grave. Many had admired her on the stage, but only two men had been allowed to love her, to know anything of her in her private life. Of those two one was the murdered man, Monsieur de Maucroix; the other was the murderer, Georges."

"Did you find the flowers renewed after this day, or did the murderer take alarm and forego his tribute to the dead?"

"The roses were renewed week after week for more than a year after that foggy Saturday afternoon; but I never again saw the person who laid them there. I had, indeed, no desire to see him again. I had satisfied myself as to his identity. I did not want to betray him to the police. The shedding of his blood might have avenged my dear mistress's death, but it could not have restored her to life. It could have been no consolation to her in purgatory to know that this man, whom she had once loved, who had loved her only too well, was to die on the scaffold for her sake. I hated him as the murderer of my mistress, but I pitied him even in the midst of my hatred. I pitied him for the reality of his love."

"You say the flowers appeared on the grave for more than a year after that February afternoon?" said Heathcote. "Did the tribute fall off gradually? Was the wreath renewed at longer and longer intervals till it ceased altogether, or did the offering stop suddenly?"

"Suddenly. In the March of the second year after madame's death I found a faded wreath on my weekly visit, and that faded wreath has never been replaced."

"That would be in March, 1874?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You never saw Georges again, either in the cemetery or anywhere else?"

"Never, monsieur."

"I have been told that he was a French Canadian. Have you any knowledge as to his country or to his family history?"

"None, monsieur. I always supposed him to be a Frenchman, I never heard him speak in any other language."

"Did he speak like a Parisian?"

"No, monsieur. He did not speak exactly like the people about

here, or the actors at the Porte Saint Martin. I used to think that he was a provincial."

"Did you hear from your mistress what part of England she had visited?"

"I heard, monsieur, but have forgotten. The names of places were strange to me—such queer names—but I knew it was a place in which there were lakes and mountains."

"Was it in Scotland or Ireland?"

"No, monsieur, it was in England. I am sure of that. And now, if monsieur would like to see the third floor."

Heathcote said he was most anxious to do so, and he followed Mme. Leroux upstairs, to a landing out of which the door of the apartment opened. The rooms were small and low, but well lighted, and with a balcony looking out on the street. The little *salon* was neatly furnished, with those very chairs and tables which Marie Prévol had bought out of her first economies as an actress. The things were meager and shabby after the wear and tear of years, but the perfect neatness and cleanliness of everything made amends. Barbe Leroux was one of those admirable managers who by sheer industry and good taste can make much out of little.

There was a tiny dining-room opening out of the *salon*, with a window overlooking chimneys and backs of houses, and this window had been filled with painted glass in the time of M. Georges. All the other elegances and luxuries with which he had embellished the cozy little rooms had been disposed of at the sale of Marie Prévol's effects. There had been Venetian mirrors and girandoles on the walls of the dining-room, Barbe explained.

"Madame used to light all the wax candles when she came in from the theater. There were candles on the supper-table with rose-colored shades. There were fruits and flowers always. Everything was made to look pretty in honor of Monsieur Georges—and there had to be some delicate little dish for supper, and choicest wine. Monsieur was not a man who cared much what he eat or drank; but madame wished that everything should be nicely arranged, that the supper table should look as inviting as at the Café de Paris or at the Maison d'Or."

The bedroom opened out of the *salon*. There was a dressing-room between that and the little back room in which Barbe had slept when she was in Mlle. Prévol's service. On her occasional visits, Leonie Lemarque had occupied a truckle bed in Barbe's room.

"How was it that Leonie Lemarque in all her visits never happened to see Monsieur Georges," inquired Heathcote, when he had looked at all the rooms, peopling them in his imagination with the figures of the lovely actress and her lover.

"Madame took good care to prevent that. She told me that Monsieur Georges hated children, and that the little one was to be kept out of his way."

"Did he never spend his mornings here? Was he only here at night?"

"Only at night. It was for that reason Madame Lemarque used to call him the night-bird. I think she was angry because she was never allowed to see him—never invited to supper. Monsieur

Georges used to take a cup of coffee early in the morning, and left the house before most people were up. As early as five o'clock in summer; never later than half-past six in winter.

CHAPTER XXII.

WEDDING GARMENTS.

HILDA's presence at Penmorval was full of comfort and solace for Dora Wyllard. She had known Hilda all her life, had seen her grow from childhood to womanhood, had loved her with a sisterly love, trusting her as she trusted no one else. Hilda had been only a child at the time of Dora's engagement to Edward Heathcote, yet. even at eleven years of age, Hilda's tender heart had been full of sympathy for her brother when that engagement was broken off, and when Dora became the wife of another man. She had been angry, with vehement, childish anger. That Dora should like any man better than him who, in the fond eyes of the younger sister, seemed the prince and pattern of fine gentlemen! That Dora could, like Hamlet's widow, turn from Hyperion to Satyr?

Hilda at eleven was precocious in her knowledge of books, and very self-opinionated in her judgment of people. She told her brother that she would never speak to Dora again, that she would run a mile to avoid even seeing her; and, then, a few months after Dora's marriage, finding that her brother had forgiven that great wrong with all his heart, Hilda melted one day suddenly at meeting Mrs. Wyllard on the moor, and fell into her old friend's arms.

"I have tried to hate you for being so wicked to my brother," she sobbed, as Dora bent over her and kissed her.

"Your brother forgave me a year ago, Hilda," said Dora. "Why should you be less generous than he?"

"Because I love him better than he loved himself," cried Hilda, in her vehement way; "because I know his value better than he does. Oh Dora, how could you like anyone else better than Edward?"

"You must not ask me that, my darling. Those things can not be explained. Fate willed it so."

"And I suppose you are very happy in your grand house?" said Hilda, sullenly.

"I am very happy with the husband I love, Hilda. The grand house makes no difference. And now we are going to be good friends, aren't we, dear, and we are never going to talk of the past? How you have grown. Hilda!"

"Out of all my frocks," answered Hilda, glancing contemptuously at her ankles. "It is perfectly degrading never to have a frock long enough for one—and never to have one's waist in the right place. The dressmaker says I have no waist yet. Dress makers are so insulting to girls of my age. I think I shall positively trample upon my dressmaker when I am grown up, to revenge myself for all I have suffered from the tribe."

"My Hilda, what an old-fashioned puss you have grown."

"How can I help being old-fashioned? I never see any young

people. Edward never comes to the Spaniards now. You have driven him away."

"Hilda, if we are to be friends—"

"Well, I won't say it again; but you have, you know. It is awfully dull at home. I suppose I may say that?"

"I hear you have a new governess. I hope you like her?"

"You needn't hope that, for you know girls never do. She is a poor sheep of a thing, and I don't suppose I hate her quite so much as some girls hate their governesses. But she is dreadfully dreary. She makes her own gowns, and of an evening her needle goes stitch, stitch, stitch, in time to the ticking of the clock, while I practice my scales. I don't know which I hate most, the clock, or the piano, or the needle."

"Poor Hilda, you must spend half your time with me in future. I shall call to-morrow and ask your father's permission to have you at Penmorval as often as I like."

"He won't refuse, if there's any consistency in him," replied Hilda, "for he is always grumbling about the noise I make and about my sliding down the balusters. How did he go down stairs I wonder, at my age? Those broad balusters at the Spaniards must have been made for sliding. But fathers are so inconsistent," concluded Hilda. "I shouldn't wonder if he wouldn't rather have me and my noise at home than allow me to be happy at Penmorval."

"Let us hope that he will be reasonable," said Dora, smiling, "even though he is a father."

Mrs. Wyllard called at the Spaniards next day, and was not too graciously received by Mr. Heathcote—old Squire Heathcote, as he was called in that part of the world. He was a testy invalid, a sufferer from some chronic complaint so obscure in its complication as to seem only an excuse for ill-temper—and he had not forgiven Dora for jilting his son. He softened gradually, however, melted by the sweetness of her manner, and by memories of days that were gone, when he had admired her mother, and had been ruthlessly cut out by her father. The eyes that looked at him seemed to be the eyes that he had loved in his youth.

"If you care to be troubled with the girl I ought to be grateful for any kindness you may show her," said the squire. "She makes more noise than a regiment, and she is always disobeying her governess, or neglecting her lessons, and then I am called upon to interfere. I wouldn't mind if they would fight it out between them and leave me in peace."

"You shall be left in peace very often, if you will allow me to have Hilda for my little companion at Penmorval," said Dora. "And I promise you that her education shall not be altogether neglected while she is with me."

"If you can teach her manners, I shall be eternally your debtor," said the squire. "I would much rather a young woman should know how to behave herself in society than that she should read Æschylus or square the circle."

Thus it came about that Hilda spent a great deal of her life at Penmorval, where the sheep-like governess escorted her, or whence she fetched her with unfailing patience, grateful exceedingly when

she was rewarded with a cup of tea in Mrs. Wyllard's pretty drawing-room or in the yew-tree arbor.

And thus, in the seven happy years of Dora Wyllard's married life—her apprenticeship, as she had called it playfully last June, when the anniversary of her marriage came round—Hilda had been her chief companion. The girl had grown up at her side as a younger sister, and had been a link between Dora and Edward; albeit, these two saw each other but seldom, for Edward's home had been in the neighborhood of Plymouth, until within the last two years.

The old squire did not long survive that interview in which he complained of his young daughter's hoydenish manners. He did not live to see the hoyden soften into a graceful, modest girl, reserved and silent among strangers, full of vivacity among those whom she loved. His elder son succeeded him in the possession of the Spaniards, a bachelor and an enthusiastic sportsman. He was one of those ideal brothers with whom a sister can do just what she likes, and under his regime Hilda learned to ride to hounds, and contrived to enjoy herself as much as any girl in Cornwall. She mourned him passionately when he was snatched away in the flower of his manhood, victim to a severe cold caught during a fishing tour in Connemara.

Edward's rule was almost as kind, but not quite so easy. He had narrower ideas about the rights of young ladies, especially in relation to the hunting field.

"When I hunt you can go with me," he said, "but I will not have you flourishing about the country with no one but a groom to look after you." And this narrower rule deprived Hilda of many a day's sport. Courtenay, the elder brother, had never missed a day with foxhounds or harriers, and he had allowed his sister the run of his stables and much latitude in all things.

While Hilda was growing up under Mrs. Wyllard's wing, while Edward Heathcote changed from bachelor to married man, and then to widower, Bothwell Grahame was serving his queen and country in the far East. He could just remember having seen Hilda once as a child. He came back to Cornwall to find her a woman, or a girl on the verge of womanhood, and it was not long before he grew to believe in her as the very perfection of girlhood and womanhood in one—girlhood when she was gay, and in her more serious moods altogether womanly.

In those darker days under that heavy cloud which had fallen upon Dora Wyllard's life, Hilda's presence was an inestimable blessing. Dora was able to put aside the thought of her own great sorrow every now and then, while she entered with all her heart into the life of her young friend—the fresh young life, so full of hope in the future, of earnest purpose and sweet humility. If a king had stooped from his throne to woo her, Hilda could not have been prouder of her royal lover than she was of Bothwell. She spoke of him as one who honored her by his affection, and she seemed full of fearfulness, lest she should not be good enough for her hero. It never occurred to her that it was Bothwell who ought to be thankful, that it was he who had won the prize.

There was a sweet abnegation in this girlish love which touched

Dora deeply, she being all unconscious of her unselfish worship of her husband, her own surrender to the lover who stole her from her betrothed.

Hilda was very fearful of intruding her new joys and hopes upon her friend's sorrow.

"I ought not to chatter about our prospects, Dora, when you are so weighed down with care," she said, apologetically.

But Dora insisted upon hearing all about the new home which was to be made out of the old cottage. She insisted upon discussing the trousseau and the linen closet, glass and china, and even hardware; albeit her own lines had fallen in a mansion where all these things are provided on a lavish scale, and left to the care of a housekeeper, to be destroyed and renewed periodically, for the benefit of old established tradesmen.

"You never had a linen-closet to look after, Dora," said Hilda, pitying her friend. "That is the worst of being so rich. There is no individuality in your home life. I mean to be a regular Dutch housewife, and to keep count of every table-cloth in my stock. I shall make and mark and mend all the house linen, and I shall be much prouder of my linen closet than of my gowns and bonnets. And the china closet, Dora, ought not that to be lovely? One can get such delicious glass and china nowadays for so little money. I have looked at the Plymouth china shops, and longed to buy the things, before I was engaged; but now I can buy all the glass and china for our house—I have saved enough money out of my allowance to pay for all we want in that way."

"What an independent young person you are, Hilda!" said her friend, laughing at her; "but you must not spend all your money on cups and saucers—"

"And teapots!" interjected Hilda, "such sweet little china teapots. I will have one for every day in the week."

"Teapots are all very well, but you will have your trousseau to buy. You must keep some of your money for frocks."

"I have no end of frocks; more than enough," protested Hilda. "I shall buy just two new gowns—my wedding gown and a tailor gown for riding outside coaches in the honeymoon. Bothwell proposes that we should go round the south coast as far as the Start, and then across country to Hartland and home by Bude. That is to be our honeymoon tour."

"Very nice, and very inexpensive, dearest. And then you are to come here to live till your new home is ready."

"I am afraid we shall be very much in your way."

"You will be a comfort to me, Hilda. Both you and Bothwell will be a help and comfort to me."

Hilda spent her evenings for the most part in the invalid's room. Her sympathetic nature made it easy for her to adapt herself to the necessities of the sick-room. She could be very quiet, and yet she could be bright and gay. She could be cheerful without being noisy. She sung with exquisite taste, and sung the songs which are delightful to all hearers—songs that appeal to the heart and soothe the senses.

Julian Wyllard was particularly fond of her German ballads—Schubert, Mendelssohn, Jensen, old Volks-Lieder; but once, when

she began a little French song, "Si tu savais," he stopped her with a painful motion of his distorted hand.

"Not that, Hilda. I detest that song," and for the first time she doubted the excellence of his judgment.

"I wonder you dislike it," she began.

"Oh! the thing is pretty enough; but it has been so vulgarized. All the organs were grinding it when I lived in Paris."

"And those organs disturbed you at your work sometimes, perhaps," said Dora, seated in her accustomed place beside his pillow, ready to adjust his reading-lamp, to give him a new book, or to discuss any passage he showed her. He read immensely in those long hours of enforced captivity, but his reading had been chiefly on one particular line. He was reading the metaphysicians, from Plato and Aristotle to Schopenhauer and Hartmann, trying to find comfort for the anguish of his own individual position in the universal despondency of the modern school of philosophy.

"A man chained to a sick-bed ought to be able to console himself with the idea that the great world around him is only an idea of his own brain, and yet even when convinced of the unreality of all things there remains this one central point in the universe, the sense of individual pain. Such a belief might reconcile the sufferer to the idea of life. Ah, my Dora, if you are only a phantasm, you are the sweetest ghost that ever a man's brain invented to haunt and bless his life."

"Don't you think you might read more interesting books while you are ill, Julian?" suggested his wife.

"No, dear. These books are best, for they set me thinking upon abstract questions, and hinder me from brooding upon my own misery."

What could Dora say to him by way of comfort, knowing too well that this misery of his was without hope on earth; knowing that this burden of pain which had fallen to him must be carried to the very end; that day by day, and hour by hour the gradual progress of decay must go on; no pause, no respite—decay so slow as to be almost imperceptible, save on looking back at what had been?

"Thank God, the brain is untouched," said Julian Wyllard, when his wife pitied him in his hour of pain. "I should not have cared to sink into imbecility, to have only a dull, vague sense of my own individuality, like a vegetable in pain. I am very thankful that Spencer assures me the brain is sound, and is likely to outlast this crippled frame."

Bothwell rode over on Sunday morning as he had threatened, and appeared at the parish church with his cousin and Hilda, much to the astonishment of some of the parishioners who had suspected and almost condemned him. They were now veering round, and had begun to inform each other that Mr. Grahame had been a much-wronged man, and that there was evidently a great deal more in the mystery of the strange girl's death than any one in Bodmin had yet been able to fathom. No doubt Mr. Distin, the famous criminal lawyer, knew all about it, and his cross-examination of Bothwell Grahame had been only a blind to throw the press and the public off the right scent. The very fact of his coming all the way from

London to attend a Cornish inquest argued an occult knowledge, a shadow behind the throne. Some among Bothwell's late detractors hinted that the business involved a personage of very high rank, and were disposed to transfer their suspicions to a local peer, who was not so popular as he might have been, having but recently refused to remit more than one-third of his farmers' rent, or to renew leases at less than half the previous rental.

And now Bodmin beheld Bothwell Grahame seated in the Penmorval pew between his cousin and Hilda Heathcote, and Bodmin opined that his engagement to Miss Heathcote must now be a settled thing, since it was known that he had taken a house at Trevenna, and was building and improving there on a large scale. There were some who approved, and some who condemned; some who wondered that Squire Heathcote could allow his only sister to marry such a reprobate, others who declared that Bothwell was a high-spirited fellow, who had been a fine soldier, and would make a capital army coach; but these differences of opinion helped to sustain conversation, which sometimes sunk to a very low ebb in Bodmin for lack of matter.

It was a lovely autumn day, and Bothwell had strolled into the rose garden with his sweetheart, between luncheon and five o'clock tea, talking over their house and their future.

"And now, dearest, there is only one point to settle," said Bothwell, when they had discussed furniture and china and glass to their hearts' content, and when Bothwell had given a graphic description of sundry Chippendale chairs and early English bureaus which he had discovered and bargained for in cottages and farm-houses within twenty miles of Trevenna. "I had a little talk with Wyllard before luncheon. He is most cordially disposed toward us, and he wants to hurry on our marriage in order that he may be present at the ceremony. He feels just able to go down to the church in a Bath chair. His chair could be wheeled up the aisle, and placed within sight and sound of the altar, without being in anybody's way. He says if we delay our marriage he may no longer have the power to do even this much, and for this reason he is urgent that we should marry almost immediately. What do you say, dearest? Will you take up your burden as a poor man's wife? Will you be mine soon; at once almost. The week after next for instance?"

"Oh, Bothwell!"

"Think, dear love, there is nothing to delay our marriage except want of faith in each other or in ourselves. If you have any doubt of me, Hilda, or any doubt as to your own love for me—"

"I have none, Bothwell—not a shadow of doubt."

"Then let us be married Tuesday week. That is the day Dora suggested. She tells me that you are the most sensible girl she ever met with, and that you are not going to buy a wagon-load of clothes in order to over-dress your part in that old, old play called 'Love in a Cottage.' So you see there is nothing to wait for."

"But I must have a wedding-gown, Bothwell, and a gown for traveling."

"Then you have just a week in which to get them made, dear. Not an hour more."

There was some further discussion, but in the end Hilda yielded

to her lover's pleading. It should be any day he liked—it should be Tuesday. The two gowns should be ordered next morning. Edward Heathcote had given Dora full powers, and he would doubtless hurry home at her bidding in time to arrange the terms of Hilda's marriage settlement, and to be present at the wedding.

Bothwell was almost beside himself with gladness for the rest of the day, but good feeling impelled him to restrain his exuberance, and to be grave and quiet in the presence of the patient sufferer, whose pale, calm face told but little of mental struggles, or bodily pain. The evening was spent in Julian Wyllard's room. There was a good deal of conversation, and Hilda sung some of her favorite songs, a sacred song of Gounod's, "There is a green hill far away," which Dora especially loved, and again, "Ave Maria," by the same composer. Bothwell sat in a corner by the pretty little cottage piano, listening to the rich, full voice of his beloved, catching her thin white fingers as they strayed over the keys, ineffably happy. He had no thought of evenings in the years that were gone, when he had listened to another singer, and watched other hands, delicate, nervous fingers, glittering with diamonds. The voice was a thinner voice, a somewhat reedy soprano, and those tapering fingers had something of a bird's claws in their extreme attenuation; but he had thought the thin voice passing sweet in the days that were gone, and the hand of the siren had seemed to him perfection.

He left Penmorval soon after daybreak next morning, to ride back to Trevenna. He was to return on the following Saturday, to take up his abode there until the wedding-day, while Hilda was to return to the Spaniards almost immediately, to collect her belongings, and make herself ready for her new life. All the business of furnishing could be done after the wedding, in that interval which Mr. and Mrs. Grahame were to spend at Penmorval.

Hilda was up in time to watch from her bedroom window while her lover rode away in the misty morning, but she was much too shy to go down-stairs and wish him good by. She would have quailed before the awful eye of Stodden, the butler, had she ventured to show herself at such an unseemly hour, unchaperoned, unsanctioned by the presence of a matron. So she hid behind her window curtain and watched her true knight's departure, and did not even fling him a flower by way of love-token.

When horse and rider were out of sight, she went to her desk and wrote to her brother, urging him to come back without delay, explaining and apologizing for the early date named for her wedding—reminding him as to her marriage settlement that she wished Bothwell to profit as much as possible by her small independence—an altogether womanly letter, brimming over with love for her betrothed.

She went home that morning, and she and Fräulein Meyerstein began immediately to busy themselves with preparations for the wedding. It would naturally be the quietest of weddings, since Mr. Wyllard's condition forbade all festivity. Hilda said she would have the twins for her bridemaids, and no others. They were to be dressed exactly alike, and all in pure white, like biscuit-china figures; they were to have little Pompadour frocks and petticoats, and mob caps. There was a tremendous consultation that Monday afternoon with the chief dress-maker of Bodmin, a person of high

reputation among those steady old-fashioned people who liked to spend their money in their town, and who were naturally looked down upon by that other section of the county society which had all its clothes from London. The dress-maker had made Hilda's frocks ever since she was a baby, and was inclined to be doleful at the idea of this trousseau-less entrance into matrimony—but on being put upon her metal she declared that the neat little white satin wedding-gown, and olive-cloth traveling gown should be perfection after their kind; and then came a lengthy discussion about sleeves and velvet waistcoat, and the all-important question of buttons was treated exhaustively. Miss Pittman, the dress-maker, had been told of Doré and of Redfern, and had lain awake of a night thinking of their productions; she had been shown dresses from Swan & Edgar; but she believed that for the hang of a skirt or the fit of a sleeve she could hold her own with any house in London. And then she favored Hilda and the fräulein with a little lecture upon the righteous and unrighteous manner of making and putting in a sleeve, which was eminently interesting from a professional point of view.

The first three days of that week seemed to Hilda to pass like a dream. She managed to maintain an outward aspect of supreme calmness; but her brain seemed to her in a whirl all the time. She went in and out of the house, and wandered about the gardens without knowing why; she went hither and thither, half her time hardly knowing where she was. She began one thing after another, and never finished anything. She was always waiting for Bothwell's letters, which came by every post; albeit, a third person might have supposed that he would find very little to write about. For Hilda the letters were full of interest, and she made as much haste to answer them as if she and Bothwell had been heads of parties carrying on the business of the nation at a crisis. She was anxious to receive her brother's answer to her letter, but when it came, the reply though satisfactory on some points, was not altogether agreeable.

"Mrs. Wyllard is quite justified in saying that I left the arrangements of your wedding in her hands" (wrote Edward Heathcote). "You could have no kinder friend or wiser counselor, and to her decision, as to the date of your marriage, I bow. But I regret to say that I shall not be present at the ceremony. I have business which still detains me in Paris, and I have other reasons which hinder my being a witness of your wedding. You must not suppose that this decision on my part arises from any unfriendly feeling to Bothwell Grahame, I have reconciled myself to his marriage with you, and I shall do my utmost in the future to prove myself his friend as well as yours. He will find that the instructions I have sent as to your settlement are framed with a due regard to his interests.

"There is one thing, however, in which I desire to alter Mrs. Wyllard's scheme, kind and hospitable as her idea is—namely, with regard to your residence after your marriage. I can not allow you to spend the first few months of your married life under Mr. Wyllard's roof, while your brother's house is more than large enough to hold you and your husband. It is my wish, therefore, that Bothwell should bring you back to the Spaniards after your honeymoon,

and that you and he should live there till your new home is ready for you. You will, in all probability, be very little troubled with my company, as I am likely to remain in Paris for some time to come; and you and Bothwell can ride my hunters and consider yourselves master and mistress of everything. I must beg that upon this question my wishes shall be regarded, and that you will carry out my plan, even at the hazard of offending Mrs. Wyllard, whom you know I esteem and respect above all other women.

"And now, my dear girl, I have nothing to do but to wish you all the blessings which a good and true-hearted woman deserves when she marries the man of her choice, and to request your acceptance of the inclosed check for your house and *trousseau*.

"Your affectionate brother,

"EDWARD HEATHCOTE."

The check was for two hundred and fifty pounds; but, liberal as the gift was, it did not reconcile Hilda to the idea of her brother's absence on her wedding-day.

"It is extremely unkind of him not to come," she said, throwing the letter and inclosure into her desk. "And it is not kind of him to alter Dora's plans. I know she looked forward to having us at Penmorval. But I shall go and see her every day, poor darling."

This idea of her brother's absence on her wedding-day—that most fateful day in a woman's life—cast a shadow across the sunlight of Hilda's bliss. She could think of nothing else after the receipt of Heathcote's letter, and she was full of wonder as to his reasons for thus absenting himself upon an occasion when duty and good feeling both demanded his presence.

What could be his motive? she asked herself. He was not the kind of man to spare himself the trouble of crossing the Channel, even had it been necessary for him to return to Paris directly after the wedding. He had never spared trouble or shirked a duty. It was clear to her, therefore, that he had some very strong motive for absenting himself from the marriage ceremony.

She could only imagine one reason for his conduct. She told herself that her brother, in his heart of hearts, still doubted Bothwell, and still disapproved of her marriage. He had allowed himself to be talked over by Mrs. Wyllard. The influence of that old unforgotten love had prevailed over his own inclination. He had allowed his consent to be wrung from him, and now that it was too late to withdraw that consent he was not the less Bothwell's enemy. He could not bring himself to look on as an approving witness at a marriage which he regretted. He had told his sister that his discoveries in Paris had gone far to convince him of Bothwell's guiltlessness in relation to the French girl's death—but there was still something in the background, some prejudice yet undispelled, some doubt which darkened friendship.

It was the Thursday before her wedding-day, and her preparations and arrangements had been for the most part made. There had been, indeed, but little to do, since her return to the Spaniards as a bride would simplify matters, and give her ample time for packing her belongings, those books and knick-knacks which had beautified her own rooms, her jewels, chiefly an inheritance from

her mother; and those few wedding presents which had arrived from the three or four intimate friends who had heard of her engagement—among them an immense satin-lined work-basket from Fräulein Meyerstein—a basket provided with an orderly arrangement of tapes, buttons, cottons, and needles, such as a careful housewife must needs require in the repair of the family linen. The Fräulein had made a special journey to Plymouth in order to purchase and furnish this treasury of usefulness, and had brought it back in triumph.

"I can not give you beautiful things," said the Fräulein, apologetically. "You have too valuable jewels of your own to care for any trinket which I could offer; but in this basket you will find all things which a good wife needs to preserve order and neatness in her household goods. There is flourishing thread of every quality to darn your table linen. There are pearl buttons of every size for your husband's shirts; angolas of every shade for his socks; needles of every number; bobbins; scissors of every kind; and lastly, for remembrance of an old friend, there is this little golden thimble, which I hope you will wear every day."

And, with this little speech, the Fräulein plumped her basket down in front of Hilda and burst into tears, remembering how she, too, had once been engaged, and how adverse fate had hindered her marriage.

"You are a dear, kind soul," said Hilda, kissing her affectionately; "and I am sure you couldn't have given me anything I should have liked better. I shall think of you every day when I use it. There is nothing like a useful gift for recalling an old friend."

Dora's present arrived the same day. A George II. tea-service, with two little caddies for black tea and green tea, holding about a quarter of a pound each. Hilda thought her silver tea-pot the sweetest thing that had ever been made, and she had sat gazing at the service for an hour at a stretch, and thinking how delightful it would be to make tea for Bothwell in the cozy winter dusk, when they two should be settled in their own house above the great Atlantic sea, the curtains drawn across their old-fashioned lattices, the wind raving over the hills, the waves roaring, and they two beside the domestic hearth, wrapped in a blessed calm—two hearts united and at rest.

She had been so happy yesterday in the thought of her future, and now to-day her brother's letter seemed to have changed the aspect of things. She was full of a vague disquietude—could not settle to any task, did not even care to take her usual walk across the hills to the Manor to inquire about Mr. Wyllard's health, and to spend an hour in confidential talk with Dora. To-day she sent a messenger instead, and sat all day in her own room brooding over Heathcote's letter. She felt unequal to facing the twins or the Fräulein, and pleaded a headache as a reason for not going down to luncheon; and indeed her troubled thoughts about that letter from Paris had given her a very real headache.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when she heard a carriage drive up to the hall door, and thought with horror that she would be summoned to receive callers. Her window commanded only an

angle of the porch. She could just see a shabby-looking vehicle, which she knew could only be a fly from the station; and her heart began to beat violently as she thought that perhaps after all her brother had changed his mind and had come over to do honor to her wedding.

No; it was no such pleasant surprise, only a strange lady who asked to see her. She had sent up her card.

"LADY VALERIA HARBOROUGH."

"The lady will be greatly obliged if you will see her," said the servant. "She has come from Plymouth on purpose to see you."

"Of course, I will see her," answered Hilda, cheerfully. "You have shown her into the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Take in tea as soon as you can."

Hilda glanced at her glass before she left the room. Her plain cashmere gown was neat enough, and her hair was tolerably tidy, but her eyes had a heavy look, and she was very pale.

"I'm afraid I don't look a joyful bride, or do Bothwell credit in any way," she said to herself.

She had heard her lover speak once or twice of General Harborough as his kindest and most powerful friend in India. She had heard from Dora of the general's death, and that Bothwell had attended the funeral. And now she felt flattered exceedingly at the idea that the general's widow had taken the trouble to come to see her, no doubt from pure friendliness for her dead husband's *protégé*—deeming that there was no better compliment she could pay Mr. Grahame than to assume an interest in his betrothed. She, like Dora, took it for granted that old General Harborough's wife would be an elderly woman, and she went down to the drawing-room expecting to see a stately and portly matron, gray-haired, bland, perhaps a little patronizing in her double rank of earl's daughter and general's widow. She was surprised beyond all measure when a tall and slender figure rose to meet her, and she found herself face to face with a young woman whose brilliant eyes and interesting countenance were more striking than absolute beauty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LADY VALERIA FIGHTS HER OWN BATTLE.

THE two women stood face to face in silence for a few moments. Surprise made Hilda dumb. She gazed in unconcealed wonderment at the small pale face framed in white crape, the delicate, high-bred features, refined almost to attenuation, the luminous gray eyes with their long dark lashes, eyes which alone gave life and color to the face.

Lady Valeria looked at the girl with so intent a scrutiny that those brilliant eyes of hers seemed to burn into the face of her rival; a scathing look, measuring and appraising that modest girlish beauty, cheapening those innocent charms in scornful wonder.

And this was the woman for whose sake she, Valeria, had been

flung away like an old glove. This girl-face, with its innocent blue eyes and babified bloom, its broad white forehead ringed round with infantile curls of golden brown; its delicately-penciled eyebrows, its coral lips and small white teeth.

"For people who admire babies the girl is well enough," thought Lady Valeria.

Yet even her small knowledge of phrenology and physigonomy taught her that the broad, full forehead, and the firmly-molded lips meant force of character and firmness of purpose—that this girlish-beauty was the beauty of a good and brave woman—that here there was no reed for her to twist and rend at her own passionate will, but a nature that was firmer and more concentrated than her own. Equal forces had met in these two; the force of passion and the force of principle.

"So you are Miss Heathcote," said the pale lips at last, after that silent interval, in which Hilda had heard the beating of her own heart; "you are the Miss Heathcote who is to marry Bothwell Grahame?"

"Yes, Lady Valeria. Bothwell has told me how kind a friend he had in General Harborough," returned Hilda calmly, trying to feel at her ease under that searching gaze. "I am very much flattered that you should come to see me."

"I fear you will feel less flattered when you know the motive of my visit. No, thanks, I prefer standing," she said, curtly, as Hilda wheeled a luxurious chair toward her guest, and courteously invited her to be seated; "you will hate me, no doubt, when you know why I am here—and yet I am come to do you a service, perhaps the greatest service which one woman can render to another."

"What service, Lady Valeria?" asked Hilda, whose girlish bloom had been momently fading, and who was now almost as pale as her visitor.

"I am here to save you from a most unhappy union—from a fatal union—from marriage with a man who loves another woman!"

"That is not true," said Hilda, very calmly. "Whoever your informant may have been, Lady Valeria, you have been misinformed. I am as firmly convinced of Bothwell Grahame's love, and of the worth of his character, as I am of my existence. I would as soon doubt one as doubt the other."

"You are like most girls of your age reared in the country," said Lady Valeria, with quiet scorn. "You are very ignorant, and you are very vain. I suppose you imagine that you are the first woman Bothwell Grahame ever loved—that at three-and-thirty he brings you a heart hitherto untouched by beauty; that his senses only awake from a life-long torpor at sight of your exquisite charms; that nothing less than your exceptional loveliness could kindle that cold nature into flame?"

"Lady Valeria, if you came here only to insult me—" began Hilda, moving toward the door.

"I came here to read you a lesson, to save you from life misery if I can, and you shall hear me," said Valeria, passionately. "I am here for your sake, do you understand?—to save you and your lover from an irreparable folly. He would sacrifice his own happiness and a brillant future from a mistaken sense of honor to you. Now,

I want you at least to know what manner of sacrifice he is going to make for you, and if you are not made of wood—if you have a woman's heart in your bosom—you will release him."

"Release him! What do you mean, Lady Valeria? This is sheer madness. Mr. Grahame sought me of his own accord—chose me deliberately for his wife, in the face of great difficulties. We are both completely happy in our love for each other—in our faith for each other. There never was a fairer prospect of a happy domestic life than that which smiles upon us. There is not a cloud, or the shadow of a cloud, between us."

The butler brought in a little bamboo table, and arranged the old-fashioned tea-tray, and during this brief interruption hostilities were suspended, and both women composed their faces to placid neutrality. Lady Valeria declined Hilda's cup of tea, proffered with a tremulous hand, and directly the butler had gone she coldly pursued her interrogation.

"Answer me one question, Miss Heathcote. Do you believe yourself Mr. Grahame's first love?"

"No," faltered Hilda. "I knew that there was some one else—that there was an entanglement from which Mr. Grahame released himself, honorably and thoroughly, before I accepted him as my future husband. I made that condition when first he asked me to be his wife. I waited until he could give me his assurance upon this point before I consented to marry him."

"Oh, then you did know that there was some one?" exclaimed Lady Valeria, with crushing scorn. "You did know that there was an entanglement—or, in plain words, you knew that you were stealing another woman's lover?"

"Lady Valeria, you have no right to say such a thing."

"I have every right Yes, you knew well enough what you were doing, in spite of your provincial bringing up. Every woman is wise in these matters. An entanglement, you say. Do you know, girl, that this entanglement of which you speak so flippantly was a passionate, all-absorbing love, a love that had lasted three years, that had braved all consequences, that had laughed at danger—a love that burns in every line of these letters? Read them; read them, girl, and see what your 'entanglement' means."

She had opened her reticule and had taken out a packet of letters while she was speaking. She flung the packet on to a table near Hilda.

"Read them, Miss Heathcote. I suppose you know Mr. Grahame's handwriting. I suppose he has written to you."

"I can see that they are in Bothwell's hand," said Hilda, looking down at the bundle of letters as if they had been a nest of scorpions, "but I decline to read letters that were not written to me."

"You are afraid to read them?"

"I will take it upon trust that they are love-letters. May I ask if they were addressed to you—General Harborough's wife?"

The calm and measured accents, the steady gaze of those candid blue eyes, the resolute attitude, the small well-balanced head proudly erect, the nervous hands clasped firmly on the back of a chair by which the girl was standing, surprised Lady Valeria, and with a far from pleasant surprise. She had expected Hilda to be more easily

crushed. She had expected to see a sentimental love-sick girl sobbing at her feet, ready to surrender her lover at the first attack. And instead of girlish weakness, she found a woman prepared to do battle for her love.

"The letters are addressed to me. I should much like you to read them, in order that you may understand what Bothwell Grahame's 'entanglement' was."

"I decline to read them. It is quite enough for me to know that he was in love with a married woman, and that she encouraged his love—she, the wife of a good and brave old man—she, who by the right of her noble birth should have been prouder, truer, purer than women of meaner race. She stooped so low. I am very sorry that you came here, Lady Valeria, and very sorry that we have ever met—very sorry that you have told me your secret."

"It is everybody's secret by this time. A woman in my position is surrounded by lynx-eyed friends, who read her inmost thoughts. Everybody knows that Bothwell Grahame loved me, and that I returned his love. To you this seems terrible, no doubt. Yet I can tell you that I was a true wife to my husband, as the world estimates truth, and that he died honoring me. You with your provincial ignorance and narrow mind can not imagine a love which, although unconquered, could remain pure—passionate, intense, devoted, but unstained by sin. Such a love I cherished for Bothwell Grahame, and he for me. We had promised each other that whenever my release came, and in the due course of nature it was not likely to be long deferred, our lives should be linked, our love should be blessed. I lived on that hope, and to Bothwell, as those letters would tell you, that hope was no less dear than to me. Honor, right feeling, honesty, were all involved in the promise which bound Bothwell Grahame to me; and I never for an instant doubted that he would keep that promise, never doubted that he was mine till death. But in an evil hour he met you. He was under a cloud. He was maddened by the idea that his neighbors thought the foulest things of him. You interposed with your girlish sympathy, your sentimental prettiness. You consoled, you encouraged him in his dark hour; and that impulsive nature was moved to a step which he has repented ever since. He committed himself by an avowal which left him no possibility of retreat, and to be true to you he has broken the most sacred promise that man ever made to woman."

"You released him from that promise, Lady Valeria."

"Never. Some hasty words passed between us on one occasion, and we parted in anger. But there was no confession on his part; no release on mine."

"He told me that the lady he had once loved had released him," said Hilda, terribly crest-fallen.

She could not believe that Lady Valeria Harborough would tell her a deliberate lie. She was convinced, in spite of herself. Bothwell had deceived her.

"I beg you to read those letters," urged Valeria. "If you do not read them you may think just a little worse of me than I deserve. I do not pretend to be a good woman; but I want you to know that my attachment to Bothwell Grahame never degenerated into a low intrigue. You may hear the vilest things said of me,

perhaps, by and by, when it is known that Mr. Grahame is not going to marry me."

Hilda looked at the letters. She knew that the reading of them would wring her heart; and yet the temptation was too strong to be steadfastly resisted.

Slowly, reluctantly, almost as if under the influence of a mesmerist, Hilda's hand was extended to the packet of letters. She took it up, and looked at it for a few moments, still hesitating.

The letters were folded lengthwise, without their envelopes. Bothwell's bold large hand was easy enough to read, even at a glance. Without untying the packet Hilda could see the nature of those letters. "My dearest love," "My life," "My ever beloved." Such words as those scattered on the folded pages told the character of the correspondence. She had known from the first, from his own lips, that he had cared for another woman, that he had been in some manner bound to that other woman—his future life so compromised that he must needs win his release from that tie before he could offer himself honorably to his new and better love. She had known this, and yet the sight of those impassioned phrases in the hand of her betrothed tortured her almost to madness. She flung the packet from her, flung it at her rival's feet, as if it had been some loathsome reptile that had fastened on her hand.

"It is shameful, abominable," she cried. "Such words as those written to another man's wife. I will read no more—not a line—not a syllable."

"But you shall read, or you shall hear," said Valeria, taking up the packet. "You shall know what kind of vows this man made to me, this man whom you are going to marry."

She drew out a letter haphazard, and thrust it into Hilda's hand, forced her to read by sheer strength of will, watching her with flashing eyes all the while.

Hilda read words of such passionate vehemence that it was difficult to believe that transient feelings could have inspired them—words that told of rapturous delight in a reciprocal love, and fondest hope of future union; words that made light of all things in earth and heaven as weighed against that all-absorbing love. She read of that scheme of the future in which the ultimate marriage of the lovers was counted on as a certainty.

And it was for her sake he had abandoned this old dream—this plan of a life so long cherished. It was for her, an obscure, country-bred girl, who could bring him neither fame nor fortune, that he had surrendered all hope of calling this brilliant, high-born woman his wife.

And now the hour had come when he might have claimed her, when, his years of servitude being over, he had but to wait the brief span society demanded before he stood before the world with this woman by his side, the sharer of her social status, her ample means. Surely this would have been a happy fate for him, if there were any truth in these words of his, words which seemed to scorch Hilda's brain as she stood, silent, motionless, poring over them.

"You see," said Lady Valeria, after a long sigh, "that once at least your lover loved me."

"I thought that once in such things meant forever," answered

Hilda, with a quiet sadness, as of one who speaks of the dead. "Yet the man who wrote this letter has talked and written of his love for me just as tenderly, just as passionately, as he has written here. Yes, I knew that he had cared for some one else, but not like this. I did not think such a love as this could come twice in a life-time."

"You are wiser than I expected to find you," said Valeria, with languid insolence. "No, child, men do not love like that twice in a life-time. I had Bothwell Grahame's heart at its best—his constancy—his devotion—and he would have been true to me till the end of his life had it not been for that business of the murder, which made men look askance at him, and your childish pity, which touched his heart when it was sorest. He was caught in the toils of his own affectionate nature. His grateful heart, which always melted at the least kindness, betrayed him. And because he was sympathetic and grateful, you thought he loved you; and now you stand between him and his first love. You are the only barrier to a marriage which would make Bothwell Grahame a rich man, and me the happiest of women."

"If you had heard him talk of our future; if you had seen him planning our home, you would hardly doubt that he meant to be happy with me, Lady Valeria," said Hilda.

"My child, I have seen your future home, I have heard what kind of a life Bothwell Grahame is to lead as your husband. He is to be a school-master, cramming dull boys for impossible examinations, grinding mathematics and engineering theories all day long and every day, till his brain is weary, going over the same ground again and again like a horse in a mill. He is to be a nobody, a plodding bread-winner living year after year in a God-forsaken village, far away from the great arena of life; ground down by the fathers and patronized by the mothers of his pupils. He is to cherish no higher ambition than to be able to pay the butcher and the baker, and to get himself a new coat before the old one is threadbare. *That* is the life to which your generous love would condemn him."

"We are not going to be quite such paupers as you imagine Lady Valeria. I have a small income of my own, which will at least pay the baker, and I do not think Bothwell's rich cousin would see him in want of a coat."

"My dear Miss Heathcote, it is only a question of degrees. Granted that Mr. Grahame is sure of his breakfast and dinner, his existence as a private tutor will be none the less a life of exile from all that makes life worth living—from the world of art and letters, from the strife and the glory of politics, from the great world of distinguished men and women. As my husband, he would have the ball at his feet. His fortune would be large enough to command an opening in any career he might choose for himself, his connections on my side of the house would be powerful enough to help him, and his talents would undoubtedly bring him to the front. In the House his career would be assured. With his knowledge of India and Indian war tactics he would inevitably make his mark. There are hardly three men in the House of Commons who have any real knowledge of that vast Eastern world for which English poli-

ticians legislate. You see, I have dreamed for him, thought for him. All my ambition is for him, and not for myself."

"I am willing to believe that you love him, Lady Valeria," said Hilda, with frigid distinctness of utterance, looking her rival full in the face, "since nothing but the blindest love could induce any woman in your position to lower yourself as you have done—first in India as General Harborough's wife, and secondly to-day as General Harborough's widow—when you come to me and ask me to give up my betrothed husband, the man to whom I am to be married next Tuesday; for I suppose that is the gist of all you have said to me."

"I ask nothing from you, Miss Heathcote. I know the narrow view which most girls of your age, brought up as you have been, take of life and its obligation. I do not expect large-minded ideas from a young lady with your surroundings." This was said with infinite scorn of Hilda's rustic bearing. "But I think it well that you should know how much Bothwell Grahame sacrifices for the privilege of having you for a wife. Of course, it is quite possible that the recompense may be worth the sacrifice. It is for you to judge of that. I wish you good-day."

Hilda bowed and rang the bell, without a word. She did not accompany her visitor to the drawing-room door, but stood in a stony silence looking out at the window in front of her, with fixed eyes.

It was only when the outer door had closed on Lady Valeria that the girl flung herself on the nearest sofa and abandoned herself to her grief.

Alas, this entanglement of the past had been something more than a garland of roses. It had been a chain from which her lover had tried to relieve himself, but whose iron links yet hung about him.

All the happiness was gone out of her life, all the sweet tranquillity which had been the holiest charm in her love for Bothwell, the deep faith in her beloved, the assurance of his trustworthiness, his unalloyed love for her. How could she ever again believe in that love after she had heard the history of his passion for another; after she had read of that wild infatuation in his own hand; after she had seen the woman he had thus loved and thus addressed—a woman to win and hold the love of men—a woman whose beauty had that subtle charm of supreme refinement and distinction which is far above the peach-bloom tints and perfect lines of stereotyped loveliness. In Valeria, the broken-hearted girl acknowledged a siren before whose potent fascinations the wisest man might be as a fool. She compared herself with her rival. She walked across the room and stood before the long console glass, contemplating her own image, half-scornfully, half-sorrowfully. The pale, tear-blotted face appeared at its worst, without the freshness that constituted half its beauty. The slight and girlish figure looked insignificant as compared with Valeria's statelier bearing.

The girl turned herself about, and looked at herself at every angle, as if she had been trying on a gown at her milliner's.

"What a dowdy I look," she said to herself. "Just the very pattern for a school-master's wife. I don't suppose Lady Valeria is more than an inch taller, and yet she looks a queen. It is the way

she carries her head, I suppose, and the way she walks, like a woman accustomed to command. Yes, a man might well be proud of such a wife, and of the position such a wife could give him. Bothwell in Parliament. Bothwell a great authority on Indian affairs. How strange it sounds. But I know how clever he is. How well he can talk upon any subject. It would be a splendid career for him. And for my sake he is to forego all that and to drudge as a tutor in a Cornish village. Yes, I suppose it would be a dreadful life for such a man—though it seemed so full of brightness when we two talked about it last week. For my sake. No, Bothwell," she said to herself, resolutely striking her clinched hand upon the marble table, "No, Bothwell, not for my sake! You shall not surrender fame and fortune for my sake!"

And then seating herself on the low, old-fashioned window-seat, with clasped hands lying in her lap, and steadfast eyes brooding on the ground, in an attitude of deepest thought, she retraced the history of Bothwell's courtship. She asked herself if she had verily been, as Lady Valeria had insinuated, herself half the wooer. She remembered how, in the beginning of their acquaintance, she had admired Dora Wyllard's cousin—how his riding, his singing, his conversation had alike seemed perfection. How she had contrasted him, to his wondrous advantage, with the country squires around and about. It was just possible that in her girlish inexperience she had betrayed her admiration, had flattered Bothwell into the idea that he liked her. And then when the hour of trouble came, it was true that she had made no effort to hide her feelings; she had given Bothwell her sympathy almost unasked; she had, perhaps, lured him into declaring himself as her lover, when the feeling which inspired him was but the impulse of the moment, a transient emotion, born of gratitude.

She could understand how, in his self-contempt, his wounded honor, he had believed that his love for Valeria was a thing of the past, had been glad to release himself from an ignoble bondage. But now that Valeria was free, his first love, as devoted to him as ever, valuing her fortune and position only as a means for his advancement, who could doubt that the old love would revive in his breast with all the old fervor; that his heart would go back to his first beloved, as a bird returns to its nest?

And was his whole life to be sacrificed because of this one mistaken impulse? No, the wrong was not yet irreparable. The marriage planned for next Tuesday need never take place.

Hilda began deliberately to scheme out the manner in which she should set her lover free. If the thing was to be done it must be done bravely and thoroughly—not by halves. There must be no half-hearted action, no wavering, no pretense of surrender offered in the hope that Bothwell would refuse to accept his liberty. No; she must make the sacrifice as full and as effectual as that of Iphigenia, or of Jephtha's daughter. They gave their lives. She could give her happiness, her fair future, the sweet ideal she had dreamed of, the life which to every good woman seems of all lives most perfect, an existence spent in tranquil seclusion with the husband of her choice.

After long brooding, deepest thought interrupted ever and anon

by a burst of passionate weeping tears which would not be restrained, Hilda Heathcote had made her plan. She would go away, quite away, where Bothwell could not follow her. She would write him a letter which would leave him free to return his old allegiance, while she herself would disappear, drop quietly out of the circle in which she was known, and remain hidden from all her friends for the next few months, perhaps for a year; at any rate, until the joy-bells had rung for Bothwell's marriage with his old love. Alas, those joybells! She had imagined them ringing for her own wedding, had heard their sweet music in her dreams.

Where should she go? What should she do with herself during the time of hiding? That was the question, and it was a difficul one for this inexperienced girl to answer. She had traveled so little, that all the wide world outside her own home was no more familiar to her than a chapter of geography. She knew the names of mountains and rivers, she had made her dream-pictures of beautiful places and scenes in far-away lands, but of railways and steamers, of the mode and manner of journeying from one place to another, of hotels and custom-houses, and the exchange of money, she knew hardly anything.

"I must go somewhere very far away, to some place where he would not think of following me, where he could never find me," she said to herself, supposing that it would be a point of honor with Bothwell to follow her, to keep his plighted troth, if it were possible.

She wanted to set him free, to make it easy for him to go back to his old love. She told herself that Lady Valeria had spoken the truth, and that it was not possible for him to have forgotten that old love.

When he had married Valeria, she, Hilda, would be free to come back to her home, to take up the thread of her broken life and follow it on to the dreary end. What joy could she have in her life, having lost him? Only the joy of knowing that she had loved him better than herself, cared more for his happiness than her own—the joy of woman's martyrdom.

After long deliberation, after having thought of a voyage to Australia, or a trip to Canada—after having meditated upon various possible and impossible journeys, she decided upon a very commonplace course of proceeding. She had often heard it remarked of a levanting criminal that if he stayed in London or any populous city he would in all probability have escaped his pursuers, he would have been lost in the press of humanity, like a bubble in a running stream, whereas the man who goes to America is almost inevitably traced and trapped.

She would not go to London, a city she hated, and where she might at any moment run against her Cornish friends, all of whom paid occasional visits to the metropolis. She would go to Paris, where she would be lost among strangers—where she could live quietly in some obscure quarter, improving herself as a singer and pianiste, until her time of probation was over, and the announcement of Bothwell's marriage told her that her sacrifice had been consummated. She would so plan her life that her brother could know that she was well and well cared for; but even he should not

know the place of her residence, lest he should betray her secret to Bothwell.

This idea of Paris was partly traceable to an old influence. Until a year ago she had taken lessons from a bright little French woman who had taught her music and singing, and who had helped her incidentally with her French. The lessons had been going on for three years when Hilda was pronounced to have finished her musical education, or at least to have learned as much as Mlle. Duprez could teach her, and in those three years the little Frenchwoman had been a weekly visitor at the Spaniards, coming all the way from Plymouth to give her lessons, and being driven back to the station by her pupil, after a cheery luncheon, which the little woman thoroughly enjoyed.

Mlle. Duprez claimed kindred with the famous French tenor of that name, and had herself been a small celebrity in her way. She had sung at the Opera House in the Rue le Peletier, in the days when Falcon was Diva, and Halevy's Juive was the success of the hour. Then came a fatal fever, caught at Nice, where she had gone to fulfill an autumnal engagement. Louise Duprez lost the voice which had been her only fortune. Happily, though the voice was gone, the exquisite method learned from Garcia, and ripened at the feet of Rossini, still remained, and by her excellence as a teacher of singing and piano, Mlle. Duprez had contrived to make a comfortable living first in Paris, and afterward at Plymouth, whither she had come at the suggestion of Edward Heathcote, who had made her acquaintance at the house of one of his Parisian friends, and who had recommended her to try a residence in Devonshire as a cure for her delicate chest, promising at the same time to do all in his power to help her in finding pupils at Plymouth, where he was at that time town clerk.

Mlle. Duprez had followed Mr. Heathcote's advice, and had not waited long before she found herself fairly established in the Devonshire seaport. Hilda had been her first pupil, and Hilda she loved almost as a maiden aunt loves the prettiest and most amiable of her nieces. It was Hilda she quoted to all her other pupils. "You should hear a dear young pupil of mine—Miss Heathcote, of Bodmin—sing that song," she would say, and an eloquent shrug of her shoulders and elevation of her eyebrows would express how wide the difference between Miss Heathcote's perfection and the shortcoming of the performer now in hand.

Hilda was very fond of the lively little Parisienne: loved to hear her talk and to learn of her: hung upon her words as she expounded the delicacies of her native language. Hilda petted and made much of the little woman whenever she came to the Spaniards; had never spent a day in Plymouth without paying her old mistress a visit. And now, in her sorrow and difficulty, it was of Louise Duprez she thoughts as the one friend whom she could trust with her secret, and who would be able to help her.

Hilda went to her own room before Fräulein Meyerstein returned from her afternoon walk with the twins. Those well-brought-up infants were ruthlessly sent from their play-room, their rocking-horse and the doll's house, an hour after their early dinner, and were taken for afternoon drill by the fräulein. Needless to say that

they detested the formal trudge along dusty lanes, and abhorred the beauties of nature encountered on the way; but their health no doubt profited by this severe regimen.

Hilda shut herself in her own rooms for the rest of the evening, with the usual plea of a headache. But she was up before daybreak next morning, and by six o'clock she had packed a small portmanteau and a Gladstone bag with her own hands, and carried them down surreptitiously to the stable-yard, where she gave them to an underling, with directions to put them in the pony cart and take them to Bodmin Road Station in time for the eight o'clock train. She herself intended to walk to the station, as her appearance on foot would be less likely to attract attention than in the pony cart with the luggage.

So in the dewy early morning, alone and unattended, with ashen cheeks and eyelids swollen by long weeping, Hilda Heathcote crept out of her brother's house, and walked across the hills, trusting to the keen breath of the autumn wind to obliterate the traces of a night of anguish before she arrived at the station.

She had left letters for her brother and for the fräulein. No one need be made uneasy at her disappearance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ELOPEMENT ON NEW LINES.

MLLE. DUPREZ occupied a first floor in an airy terrace of houses overlooking the Hoe. She was the kind of little woman to whom eating and drinking and fine dress are matters of very small moment, but who could not endure to live in a shabby house or an ugly neighbborhood. All her surroundings were neat and bright and fair to look upon. She had brought over her furniture from Paris. It was the remnant of that furniture which had adorned her great-grandmother's house at Versailles before the fiery spirits of the *tiers etat* met in the tennis-court, and the revolution began. There was not much of it left, but that little was of the best period in French cabinet work, and in the most perfect taste.

Mademoiselle loved this heritage from her ancestors as if the chairs and sofa, buhl and ormolu cabinet and writing-table had been living things. She used to sit and contemplate them sometimes, between the lights, in a dreamy mood, and think how much they might have told her about Marie Antoinette and her court, and the old days of the Œil de Bœuf, if they could but have found a voice The *bonheur du jour* with its ormolu mounts used to seem very human as the firelight shone upon it. The goat's heads used to wink and twinkle like human eyes, while the floral moldings assumed the form of a broad human grin as who should say, "Ah, I could tell you some fine farces about those ladies, if I could but speak!"

Mademoiselle's rooms were always the very pink of neatness; not a book out of line on the shelves above the *secretaire*, not a rag of

work or a stray pincushion littering the tables; newspapers, pamphlets, magazines all in their places; while mademoiselle was one of those dainty little women who never have a pin awry in their toilet.

So when Miss Heathcote was ushered into the singing-mistress's *salon* at half-past nine in the morning, her unexpected appearance at such an early hour caused neither confusion nor annoyance.

Mademoiselle had been breakfasting at a small table in front of the open window, a temperate meal of coffee and roll neatly arranged on a tray. Spotless damask and pretty china made the tray a picture, with mademoiselle's fresh, pink cambric gown and bright little face for background.

"My dear child, how early; I am enchanted to see you," she cried, jumping up and kissing her old pupil on both cheeks. "What a good girl to come to me before my day's work begins. This is one of my full days, from eleven till five. Squall, squall, thump, thump, every kind of outrage upon the genius of harmony must these poor ears of mine listen to; and I must be very polite, all the same—must not lose patience and cry aloud—ah, how I long to do it sometimes:—'My love, you have no more voice than a peacock, no more ear than a four-post bedstead, your accent is diabolical, and you are the very embodiment of idiocy.' You see one must not be quite frank with one's pupils. But, Hilda, my pet, what is the matter? You have been crying!"

"Not since last night, mademoiselle," answered Hilda, looking at her friend with hard, dry eyes. "I cried so much last night that I don't think I shall ever shed a tear again. There must be an end, you know, even to tears."

"My sweetest child, what in heaven's name has happened? Your brother, Mr. Effecotte!"

Louise Duprez gasped as she spoke the name. Edward Heathcote was her benefactor, that one Englishman whom she admired and honored with all her heart and mind, whom she thought almost equal to the typical Frenchman, the French gentleman of a *régime* that is almost forgotten, of a day that is dead.

"My brother is quite well, at least as far as I know," answered Hilda, with sisterly indifference; and then she made Mlle. Duprez sit down, and knelt at her feet, clasping her hands and looking up at her earnestly. "My dear kind friend, I want you to help me in a crisis of my life," she said.

"To help you to run away with Mr. Grahame, I suppose. No, no, Hilda, *pas si bête.* I am your brother's friend, above all things. If Mr. Effecotte disapproves of your marriage, I will do nothing to further it."

"Don't be in such a hurry, mademoiselle," said Hilda. "Hear my trouble first, and then help me to lighten it if you can. I think you ought to know that I am not the kind of girl to make a runaway marriage."

"Indeed, I know nothing of the kind about any English girl. Runaway marriages seem as common in this country as runaway knocks at my door."

"Englishwomen run away before marriage, and Frenchwomen after," retorted Hilda.

"I don't think your English maidens such irreproachable creat-

ures," said the Parisienne. "There is your Lady Valeria Harborough, for instance, who had one of the best husbands in Christendom, and yet was always surrounded by a herd of admirers, and made herself more talked about than any woman in Plymouth."

"Was she really talked about?" asked Hilda, eagerly.

"Really—really! I don't mean to say that she was supposed to be actually incorrect in her conduct; but she brought her Indian manners back to England with her. And now the papers are beginning to be impertinent about her—or, at least, this stupid little paper, which models itself on some of the London society papers."

Mlle. Duprez pointed to a periodical on the table at her side, a sheet of eight pages, printed on pink paper, and calling itself the "Plymouth Censor." Hilda snatched it up, and ran her eye rapidly along the paragraphs, till she came to one worded thus:

"Rumors are already afloat in privileged circles as to the probabilities of a second hymen for the beautiful widow of a general officer lately gone over to the majority. Foremost in the betting stands a certain *ci-devant* captain of engineers, who saved the general's life by a dexterous shot in the jungle, and who has been *du dernier bien* with Lady V—— ever since. Ours is an age of rehabilitations."

"Lady Valeria was right," murmured Hilda. "People know all about her folly. Her only redemption will be her marriage with Bothwell."

And then she opened her heart to her old friend—told her everything that had passed between herself and Lady Valeria—told her how she had made up her mind to sacrifice her own happiness rather than to let Bothwell's life be spoiled by a mistaken engagement. At first, mademoiselle ridiculed her plan as Quixotic to absurdity, and refused to have anything to do with it. But the girl's indomitable resolution, her intense earnestness of purpose, prevailed at last over the Frenchwoman's scruples. Louise Duprez, at four-and-forty years of age, was as romantic as the simplest school-girl. She had spent the last fifteen years of her life almost entirely among girls. She had been the confidante of their love affairs, their fond dreams of the ideal; she had counseled and lectured them, had sympathized and sorrowed and joyed with them. And now she was quite ready to be impressed by the heroic element in Hilda's intended sacrifice. The happiness of one young life given away to secure the fame and fortune of another and dearer life. It was a grand and romantic scheme, which kindled all Louise Duprez's warmest fancies.

"Would I were young again to do such a thing myself for my beloved," she thought to herself, with a tender sigh for her only lover, who had perished, a rubicund, burly major of artillery, on the bloody field of Sedan.

"How shall I ever answer to your brother, my best of friends, if I assist you in rebellion against him?" asked Mlle. Duprez, after a thoughtful silence.

"I am not rebelling against my brother; I am only leaving my home in order to break an engagement which Edward always disapproved. He gave his consent reluctantly at the last, to please Mrs. Wyllard. He will be very glad to hear that the engagement is canceled."

"But you have no right to conceal your whereabouts from him."

"The concealment need not last long—only till Bothwell has gone back to his old love, and that I should think will be very soon," with a stifled sob. "There is no use in your being unkind, mademoiselle. If I do not find a home in France with your aid, I shall find it without you. I have made up my mind to go to Southampton by the midday train, and to cross to Havre to-night. The steamer leaves Southampton at ten o'clock. There will be plenty of time for me to get there."

"And you are going alone, without even a maid?"

"Absolutely alone."

"You cannot possibly live alone among strangers—it is out of the question," protested mademoiselle.

"That is why I ask you to give me an introduction to some friends of yours in a quiet part of Paris, who will take me into their family circle and help me to carry on my musical education at the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire has been the dream of my life. You must know of such people, with your numerous acquaintance among the musical profession—"

"Yes, no doubt I know of such people. But how am I to reconcile the idea of giving you such an introduction with my duty to your brother?" argued mademoiselle.

"Your duty to my brother—if there is any such thing—is to find me a respectable home in Paris," said Hilda. "I tell you once for all, that I have made up my mind to start for Paris to-night—to live there in some quiet quarter for the next year or so. I shall go forth in the strength of my own ignorance and courage, like Miss Bird in her journey across the mountains, if you don't help me. Perhaps I may fall among thieves; and mind, if I do, it will be your fault."

She spoke with extraordinary resolution, with an animated air which seemed hardly compatible with grief. Yet this spurious gayety of hers was the worst symptom of all, and was very close to hysteria.

Louise Duprez could read the meaning that underlay that false air of good spirits. She saw that the girl was nearly heart-broken, and that this resolution of hers which she had taken up so heroically was perhaps the very best possible issue out of her sorrow; for Louise accepted Hilda's own view of the case, and took it for granted that Bothwell was willing to go back to his old love, and to profit by the chance of fortune. With her experience as a woman of the world, having seen how selfishness and self-seeking are the motive powers that propel the machine called society, Mlle. Duprez was ready to believe that General Harborough's death, and Lady Valeria's position as a rich widow, would entirely alter Bothwell's views.

It was very hard for Hilda; but still human nature is human nature, and a young man with his way to carve in the world would hardly reject such an opportunity as a marriage with Lady Valeria Harborough.

Had Hilda allowed matters to take their course, the poor young man would no doubt have gone quietly to his fate—he would have marched heroically up to the altar, he would have settled down with his young wife in the village home that he had planned for himself,

he would have drudged as a teacher of stupid lads, and he would have repented ever afterward. What happiness could possibly come to Hilda in a life spent with a disappointed man, who would remember, every day of his toilsome existence, that he had missed fame and fortune for his wife's sake.

"That a man should be fond of teaching for its own sake—*ce n'est pas Dieu possible!*" exclaimed Louise Duprez, with shuddering reminiscences of her own sufferings.

So, having reasoned thus, she made up her mind to help Hilda to carry out her act of self-abnegation.

"If I did not believe that you are acting for your own ultimate happiness, I would not aid you in this matter by one jot or one tittle," said the old woman, in her own energetic way, "but, as it is, I am going to put on my bonnet and take you to Paris."

This was said in so quiet a manner that Hilda thought her old mistress was joking.

"You don't mean to go with me?" she began.

"I don't mean to let your brother's sister travel alone, arrive alone, and a stranger, in such a city as Paris. There is no Rue des Fèves now, with its famous Lapin Blanc, where Eugene Sue's thieves used to keep their rendezvous—but for all that has been done, Paris is Paris—and if you have set your mind upon going there, I must go with you."

"But, dear mademoiselle, think of the trouble, the fatigue—and your lessons."

"My lessons must stand over till my return. I shall be back next Monday. Don't say another word, Hilda. There's no time to be wasted in talk. You are going to eat your breakfast. I'll wager you left home without so much as a cup of tea."

"There was nobody up," faltered Hilda, who had taken nothing but a cup of tea since Lady Valeria's visit, and who was suffering all the pangs of exhaustion.

"Of course not; and you have been walking and traveling, and are ready to faint at this moment," protested Louise, ringing as she spoke.

"You are going to have some nice hot coffee—I have taught them to make coffee in this house, I who speak to you—and an egg, while I write to my pupils to apologize for my sudden disappearance, and precisely at twelve o'clock there will be a fly at the door to take us to the station."

"I have a check to cash at the bank," said Hilda. "Perhaps the maid could get it cashed for me."

"For how much is your check?"

"Two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Do you think I would let my poor little slavey trot about Plymouth with two hundred and fifty pounds," cried mademoiselle. "She is as honest as the day; but the magnitude of the sum would turn her brain. She would walk into the harbor unawares. No, if you have such a check as that to cash, you must take it to the bank yourself; and instead of carrying all the cash with you to Paris, you had better draw only fifty, and leave the two hundred on deposit. You can draw more when you want it."

The slavey answered the bell, a neat little handmaiden in pink

cotton, who was told to get breakfast for Miss Heathcote, and to order a fly to be at the door at a quarter to twelve.

"That will allow us fifteen minutes for the bank," said mademoiselle, opening her desk, and beginning her letters.

Everything was done in a brisk, business-like manner. It was only when they were in the train which was to take them by way of Exeter to Salisbury, and then to Southampton, that Hilda had leisure to realize the step which she had taken.

She had written to Bothwell overnight, had opened her heart to him, telling him that his happiness was dearer to her than her own, that his honor was paramount in her mind over every other consideration. And she told him that honor should constrain him to marry the woman who had been compromised by his love in the past, and who loved him unselfishly and devotedly in the present, holding her own pride as nothing when weighed against her love for him.

"No woman could act as Lady Valeria has acted this day to whom love was not all in all," she wrote, pleading her rival's cause, because she thought it was the cause of right, and Bothwell's cause only. "Think how such a woman must have lowered herself in her own self-respect when she came to me, her interior in social station, her junior by ten years, to make confession of her love. It was for your sake she stooped so low, Bothwell.

"Do not try—out of a mistaken sense of duty—to follow me, or to dissuade me from a decision which is irrevocable. When you receive this letter I shall have entered upon a new phase of life, in which it would be almost impossible for you to find me—and if you did find me, to what end? My mind is made up. Do not allow your kind heart to be tormented by needless remorse. My heart is not broken, dear Bothwell. I mean to live my life peacefully, contentedly; to cultivate new ideas of happiness, wider horizons. You need never be troubled at the thought that this broken engagement of ours has broken my life. Be sure only of one thing, that my dearest hope, wherever I may be, will be for your welfare. To know that your life is happy will be enough to fill my cup of joy."

She had written from the depth of her faithful heart, resigning him willingly, having no sense of ill-usage, no anger even against Lady Valeria, only some touch of contempt for a woman who had been an unworthy wife to a noble husband.

And now the thing was done. Her letter—posted in Plymouth by her own hand—was on its way to Bothwell. Could she doubt, knowing what she knew, that the letter would come upon him as a welcome release—would relieve him from a most embarrassing position? And then she remembered that wretched paragraph in the "Censor;" and it seemed to her that Bothwell's first duty in life was to set Lady Valeria right before the world. Even if he had ceased to love her, his duty was not the less clear—but who could doubt that the old love still held the first place in his heart?"

The journey from Plymouth to Southampton seemed wofully long that bright September day. The sun was almost as strong as it had been in August, and the light glared in upon Hilda as she sat in the corner of the carriage, very white and very silent, but perfectly calm and collected. Her eyelids were heavy and swollen

after the night of weeping, but her eyes were tearless. Louise Duprez gave a furtive look every now and then to see if the girl was quietly weeping behind the newspaper which she pretended to read, but there were no tears in the wistful eyes so full of troubled thought.

Once, when they had the compartment to themselves for a little while between station and station, Louise put out her hand and clasped Hilda's as it held the newspaper.

"Have you changed your mind?" she asked; "you have had plenty of time for thinking in this wretched omnibus train. Shall we take another train at Exeter and go back again?"

"Not for the world," answered Hilda, firmly. "Do you suppose I did not think before I made up my mind last night? I was thinking all night long."

Mlle. Duprez gave a little submissive sigh. In her own philosophic mind she was sure the girl was right; but then Mlle. Duprez had arrived at an age when the surrender of a lover may be borne, and she was keen-witted enough to know that these things were different for Hilda.

It was only in the afternoon of the next day that they arrived at the St. Lazare terminus, whence mademoiselle drove at once to the Hôtel du Bon Lafontaine, on the left side of the Seine, a house much affected by bishops and abbés, and having a semi-clerical and old-world air altogether different from the smart caravanserys in Anglo-American Paris. Hilda was too unhappy to feel any delight in the grandeur of boulevards, churches and palaces, which she passed on her way from the station to the hotel. Her aching eyes saw all things dimly, as in a dream. She had only a vague sense of wide streets, glancing river, stupendous architecture, white in the autumn sun; and then when the carriage had crossed the river there came narrower streets, shabbier houses, and an air of busier and more homely life.

Mlle. Duprez ordered lunch at the hotel, where she was known and welcomed with friendliest greeting by manageress and head-waiter, and Hilda for the first time in her life found herself sitting in the public dining-room of a Parisian hotel. Happily at this hour of the day the room was empty, and Hilda and her friend were as much alone at their little table looking into the quaint old Parisian garden as they could have been at the Spaniards.

And now Mlle. Duprez unfolded her plans. She knew of a family living in the Rue du Bac, an artistic family, the father and sons painters, engravers, caricaturists; one of the daughters literary, another musical and a pupil at the Conservatoire—the mother all that there is of the most *bourgeoise*, but a good creature, devoted to her children, a woman to whose care Mlle. Duprez felt that she could safely confide her young friend.

"It will be a long jaunt from the Rue du Bac to the Conservatoire in the Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière," she said, "but you and Mathilde can go there together, and it will do you good to take long walks. The only danger is that you may run against your brother on the Boulevard."

"I should not think Edward would stay much longer in Paris," said Hilda.

"Perhaps while he is in Paris it would be safer for you to go in the omnibus," suggested mademoiselle. "Mr. Heathcote is not likely to be riding in omnibuses."

The little woman trotted off to the Rue du Bac, leaving Hilda to amuse herself with a flabby copy of "L'Univers," three days old, or to gaze despondently at the stony quadrangle, with its bust of the good Lafontaine, and its three or four evergreens. Seen by those melancholy eyes of hers the garden looked like a family vault, with the good Lafontaine for the father of the race.

Mlle. Duprez came back in less than an hour. She had seen that dear good soul Mme. Tillet, and had settled everything. Mme. Tillet would be happy to receive Miss Heathcote, and would be to her as a mother. By putting her two daughters into one room, she could contrive to spare a neat little sleeping-apartment for the new inmate. Things were somewhat Bohemian in the house, but what would you expect with a gifted and eccentric family? Everything was scrupulously clean. There triumphed the household genius. Mme. Tillet had been born in an old farmhouse in Brittany, where you might have eaten your dinner off the red brick floor.

Mathilde was prepared to welcome Miss Heathcote as a sister. There was no one in the family, besides herself, who cared a straw for classical music, from Beethoven to Raff. The brothers all believed in the Mme. Angot school, and had no sympathy with anything loftier. Poor Mathilde had been pining for sympathy, and to have a young companion who would toil at Bach's fugues and preludes, and cram Chopin, Raff, and Bram, and trudge to the Conservatoire with her, would be delightful.

"They are all going to make much of you," said Louise Duprez; "I will answer for that in advance. My only fear is that the three brothers will all fall in love with you, and then there will be storms. They are rather fiery spirits."

"I shall not give them any provocation," said Hilda, and indeed the pale grave face, with the troubled look in the eyes, was not suggestive of coquetry.

"Madame Tillet promises to be ready to receive you to-morrow," continued Mlle. Duprez. "I have agreed for you to pay her her own terms, which I do not think exorbitant, considering that everything in Paris is execrably dear. You are to pay her ten pounds a calendar month, which is to include everything, even to your laundress."

"It sounds very cheap," said Hilda, and she would have said the same if the sum had been twenty pounds, or even forty. She was not in a state of mind in which to consider pounds, shillings, and pence.

Mademoiselle insisted upon taking her off to see some of the sights of Paris—Notre Dame—the Louvre—and then they drove off to the Conservatoire, and made inquiries as to the conditions under which Miss Heathcote, as a stranger, might be allowed to take lessons from the professors attached to that institution. She was to take singing lessons from M. Somebody, of great renown, and music lessons from Mme. Somebody of equal renown. She was to have in all four lessons a week, on four different days; and it seemed to Mlle. Duprez that she would thus be too closely occupied to have leisure

for much grief. The professors of the Parisian Conservatoire are very severe in their teaching, and a good deal of work is required of a pupil. The pianiste must play her portion of Chopin and her tale of Bach without book at the second time of hearing. The vocalist must give proof that she has labored earnestly at her *solfeggi*.

After the business interview at the Conservatoire, where the name of Mlle. Duprez was a power, the kindly little French woman ordered the coachman to drive by the Boulevard and the Parc Monceau to the Bois de Boulogne. She steeped her young friend in the glory and beauty of Paris, hoping to prevent the possibility of much thought amidst so new and bright a world. And then she proposed that they should get seats at the Français, where a new play of Sardou's was being acted.

Hilda roused herself from the lethargy in which she had looked at the splendors of the Faubourg St. Honoré and the brightness of the Bois to protest against the idea of the theater.

"I am not going to pretend to amuse myself when I am miserable," she said. "I mean to forget Bothwell by and by, or to think of him only as a dear friend whose happiness makes me happy; but I can not pretend to have forgotten him to-day. I won't go to the theater and make believe to be amused. I should feel as if I were seeking pleasure abroad when there was some one that I loved lying dead at home. But that need not prevent your seeing Sardou's play, dear mademoiselle. I can stay quietly at the hotel, and read myself to sleep."

"My child, I don't care a straw for Sardou's play, except as a means of making you forget your troubles. We will go and take a quiet cup of tea with Madame Tillet, so that you may get reconciled to your new surroundings. That will be much better, and you must go to bed early and get a good night's rest."

They dined at the hotel, in the odor of sanctity as it were, for a bishop and a curé were dining at the table next them, and dining uncommonly well, with a nice appreciation of the *plat du jour*, and of some excellent chambertin which appeared toward the close of the entertainment.

"I hope you won't be horrified when you hear that the Tillets live over a shop," said Mlle. Duprez, as she and Hilda were walking down the Rue de Grenelle on their way to the Rue du Bac. "It is only a quiet little glover's shop, but I thought the idea might shock you."

"I am not at all shocked. I should not be, even if Madame Tillet kept the shop," answered Hilda, smiling her faint sweet smile, which told of a gentle nature and a heart in pain.

They came to the glover's shop presently, a very obscure little shop in a street where there are many big shops; shops of renown even, like the Petit St. Thomas, and the Bon Marché, the Whiteley of Paris. There was a private door beside the glover's. A narrow passage and a dark staircase conducted to the abode of the Tillets, which was on the second floor, and the approach to which echoed with sonorous laughter and manly voices, with an admixture of girlish treble.

"The children are all at home," said Mlle. Duprez, who had

been accustomed to hear Mme. Tillet talk of her bearded and manly brood as "mes enfants."

Hilda found herself presently in the bosom of the family, being embraced by Mme. Tillet, who was a stout, comfortable-looking matron in a gray cashmere gown and black mittens. The family sitting-room was a spacious apartment, with piano, book-cases, easels, drawing-tables, work-tables, all the means of various kinds of study and art, and it seemed overflowing with human life, for half buried in an arm-chair by the hearth reclined the father, while the three sons, Adolphe, Victor, and Frederic, were seated at different tables, each with his particular lamp, while the two daughters sat on each side of a large work-basket stitching industriously at a new gown which they were making together.

"Welcome, my child," said Mme. Tillet, and then proceeded to introduce her children.

Adolphe, the eldest, was distinguished for his etchings, and rose from his delicate work upon a sheet of copper to receive the new inmate. He was a big bearded fellow with a mahogany complexion, and slouching shoulders, in manners and disposition as simple as a child. Victor was a wood-engraver who worked for Hachette on the Boulevard St. Germain, hard by, and earned more money than any one else in the family. Frederic was the genius, a caricaturist. He drew for the "Petit Journal" and the "Vic Parisienne," and devoted his days and nights to the concoction of *bêtises* for those papers. Ten years ago the father had been on the high-road to fame and fortune as a painter of *genre*, but he had let other runners in the race go by him, somehow, and now the family *pot-au-feu* was supplied by the industry of the children, while the father dreamed his day-dreams, and reviled his more successful contemporaries by the domestic hearth. The sons were great, hulking, soft-hearted fellows, who adored their mother, tolerated their father's idleness without a murmur, and had no fault except that of a disposition to fall in love at the very slightest provocation.

Marcelline, the elder daughter, gained her share of the family *patee* by the exercise of her pen. She wrote for two or three fashion magazines and was an authority upon the ways and customs, the houses and gowns of the great world, under various high-sounding *noms de plume*. She signed herself in one paper La Comtesse Boisjoli, in another La Marquise de la Valliere. Needless to add that she had never crossed the thresholds of those great houses which she described so glibly. She got her information from shopkeepers, her glimpses of society from the pavement on which rank and beauty alighted for an instant in their passage from the carriage to the hall-door. All the rest was derived from a lively inner-consciousness.

Mathilde was the more serious sister, devoted to art for art's sake; believing in Bach and the severe school as the highest ideal in life, worshiping the memory of Berlioz, and despising those vanities which occupied all the thoughts of her elder sister.

All the family made Hilda welcome. They praised her French, pronounced falteringly in a paroxysm of shyness. The girls took off her hat and jacket, and installed her in a comfortable chair, while madame bustled about with the *bonne*, and set out a tea-tray and a feast of sweet cakes such as French women love. Nothing could be

more fortunate than that dear Mlle. Duprez and her sweet young friend had dropped in to tea this evening, protested Mme. Tillet, for they were momentarily expecting a visit from one of the most intellectual men in Paris, Sigismond Trottier. "You must have heard of Monsieur Trottier," said madame, "his name must be known in London as well as in Paris."

Hilda blushingly admitted that she knew very little of London, and that she had never herd of Monsieur Trottier.

"Really! But he must have a world-wide fame. The 'Taon,' for which he writes, has made a greater sensation than even the 'Lanterne' in the days of Napoleon III. The last defeat of the government was ascribed to the influence of the 'Taon.' The 'Taon' has done more to undermine the Conservative party than any other paper," said M. Tillet, from the depths of his easy-chair. "Yet politics are not Trottier's chief forte. As a politician he is trenchant and effective, but as a writer upon social topics he is really great."

The *bonne* opened the door and announced "Monsieur Trottier," and Hilda looked anxiously at the newcomer, finding herself for the first time in her life in the company of a literary genius.

She would have liked to see the literary genius in a cleaner shirt, but she had stories of Chatterton, of Savage, and Johnson and Goldsmith at heart, and it seemed to her only natural that genius should be rather dirty, and clad in a greasy olive green coat; that genius should have long gray hair, bushy eyebrows, and a cadaverous visage. She sat in her corner silently, and did not expect to be noticed, but M. Tillet presented his friend to her in a special manner, and to her surprise the olive-green genius gave a little start at the mention of her name.

"Effecotte," he exclaimed, "are all the English people, who are not Smith or Brown, called Effecotte? Or, is this young lady related to my old friend M. Edouard Effecotte, of Cornouailles?"

"Grand Dieu," exclaimed Mlle. Duprez, "what a small world it is we live in!"

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE LAND OF BOHEMIA.

HILDA looked nervously to the right and to the left, like some wild creature brought to bay, seeking some outlet whereby she could escape. Those keen black eyes scrutinizing her from under those shaggy gray eyebrows; that cadaverous countenance with its lantern jaws, seemed to her as the face of a grinning fiend. This man whom she had never seen in her life before, had but to hear her name mentioned and at once knew all about her. This Paris which she had thought of as a wilderness where she and her sorrow might hide, was a kind of trap into which she had fallen. Above all things she had wished to avoid any encounter with her brother, whose affection or whose idea of brotherly duty might interfere with her scheme of self-sacrifice.

Sigismond Trottier contemplated her curiously with his cynical smile, amused at her embarrassment, reading whole histories in her

changing color, her look of fright and desperation. Something wrong here, he told himself. A pretty girl, fallen among this band of Bohemians, in Paris, without the knowledge of her kindred. One of those social mysteries which Sigismond had such a happy knack of unraveling.

"Edward Heathcote is my brother," faltered Hilda, at last, "but he does not know that I am in Paris. I do not wish him to know."

"Consider me dumb forever upon the subject of your residence here, mademoiselle," said Sigismond, with a respectful bow. "A lady's wish is a command."

He shook hands with his old friend the painter. They had been chums for the last twenty years; and it was to his delight in Sigismond Trottier's society, among other causes, that M. Tillet owed his decadence as an artist. It was not that he had loved art less, but he had loved the Boulevard more. He had given up his nights to wit and pleasure, and he had found his working days curiously shortened in consequence. He had been renowned as one of the finest talkers upon art, famed for burning eloquence when he praised the great painters of the past, and for his scathing wit when he ridiculed the little painters of the present; for he had even then fallen to that stage in the idler's career, when a man's chief consolation is to undervalue contemporaneous merit. He had lived and enjoyed his life in those days, had spent his money faster than he earned it, and had fallen into the ranks of failure, to be supported by the toil of his wife and her children, to be the family log, the family disease. They were all very patient, those children of his. They worked for him and admired him, believed in him almost. They admired the great genius he might have been if he had only worked. They valued him for potentialities of greatness of which he talked sometimes, in his dreamy way, as if those idle aspirings had been actual achievements.

The shabby old *salon*, with its dark red paper, stained and faded with age, was glorified by some of M. Tillet's pictures, painted before his slothful hand had begun to lose its cunning. There hung the portrait of a beautiful woman, a duchess, exquisitely painted—a lovely head, an ideal neck and shoulders, in white satin and brown fur, like an old Venetian picture—the head had been successful, but shoulders, arms and draperies were still unfinished. The picture had been a commission, an offering from the duchess to her distinguished father, a minister of state, on his *fête*. But the *fête* had come and gone, and the portrait was not ready. Time had been conceded, and more time, and still the draperies remained unfinished, the picture was not fit to leave the painter's studio, and finally the commission had been canceled. Some lesser genius had painted the duchess briskly, punctually, readily, out of hand. These meaner souls can go in harness. And the meaner soul received the seven thousand francs which were to have been paid to M. Tillet, and the painter had his unfinished picture, as a kind of pendant to his incomplete life. Happily, those trustful sons and daughters of his were very proud of that unfinished portrait, and of the four or five sketches for *génre* pictures, never painted, which adorned the family *salon*. There was not another man in France who could paint like their father, they said, or who had such talent in compo-

sition. Messonnier would have been nowhere in the race if Eugene Tillet had but stuck to his easel.

Trottier and M. Tillet began to talk, and the sons went on with their work in a free-and easy maner, while madame and the daughters waited upon their guests. Poor Hilda had been so unnerved by this unexpected encounter with a friend of her brother's that she could only falter the feeblest replies to Marcelline and Mathilde, who tried to make themselves at home with her.

Marcelline, who was rather strong-minded, lost patience at last, and asked Mlle. Duprez, in an undertone, as she handed a plate of *petits foies*, if her young friend was not just a trifle stupid.

"She is as clever as you and your sister, and that is saying a good deal," replied Louise Duprez, in the same undertone, "but she has just suffered a great heart-blow, and that kind of thing is not calculated to make anyone particularly lively."

This was enough for Marcelline, who was very tender-hearted. She went back to her seat next Hilda, and took her hand at the first opportunity.

"I hope we are going to be great friends," she murmured, "although you and Mathilde will have more in common. I long to hear you sing. Mlle. Duprez says you have such a lovely voice. But perhaps you are too tired to sing to-night?"

"If you will excuse me," faltered Hilda.

"Of course, we will excuse you. You must be very tired after traveling all night. And you were dreadfully sea-sick, no doubt?"

"No; I escaped that suffering. I am never sea-sick."

"Good heavens, is that possible? If I go but a little way on the sea, the least little way, I suffer tortures, veritable agonies. And you others, you English, do not seem to suffer at all. You are a kind of sea-dogs, to whom waves and tempests are a natural element."

"I was brought up near the coast," answered Hilda. "I have been out in all weathers."

And then she thought of that wild, rock-bound coast on which she and Bothwell were to have lived, they two, all in all to each other, ineffably happy amidst simplest surroundings. She thought of the boat they were to have had—the cockle-shell row-boat in which they were to have gone dancing over the waves from Tintagel to Boscastle, or by Trebarwith sands, shining golden in the sunlight—in a bright world of life and clamor, the bird-world of gulls and cormorants, a winged populace, rejoicing in sea-foam, and light, and the music of the winds. She thought of the life that was to have been—the fairy fabric of the future, which had seemed so beautiful and so real, and which her ruthless hand had shattered.

Had she done right in so surrendering that fair future? Yes, again and again yes. The level domestic life which would have been so sweet to her as a woman, would have been stagnation, a slow decay for an ambitious man. Her simple rustic rearing had prepared her for such a life. The monotony of a village existence was all-sufficient for her narrower views, her more concentrated nature. But Bothwell had seen the world, had lived in the thick of the strife; and it was most unnatural that he should resign all ambition, and live from day to day, working for his daily bread, like a laborer

in the fields. He was to do this for her sake, his sole reward her love. It would have been, indeed, a one-sided bargain.

Hilda heard the light, airy talk around her—the talk about art and music and theaters, about the great world and its scandals, as in a dream. It was a world of which she knew nothing, and the conversation around her seemed as if it had been carried on in a kind of verbal hieroglyphics. The French she heard to-night was a new language—made up of catch words and slang phrases—lines from new plays, words twisted into new meanings—in a word, the language of the Palais Royal Theater, and the Vie Parisienne. Hilda listened and wondered most of all when Mlle. Duprez, that most classical and academical of speakers, showed herself perfectly at home in this little language of Bohemian Paris.

Sigismond Trottier was a favorite in the Tillet household. His visits were rare, and he never appeared before nine o'clock in the evening. He came nominally to tea, and the weak infusion of Bohea and the dainty little dishes of sweet cakes were always set forth at his coming; but the refreshment he most cared for was absinthe, and a small bottle of that dangerous liquor and a carafe of water were always placed on the little table near the host's arm-chair, and from this bottle M. Trottier supplied himself. That greenish hue of his complexion was the livery of the absinthe drinker, whose skin takes the color of his favorite stimulant.

Trottier was dear to Eugene Tillet as a link with that brilliant past which was now but a memory. He liked to hear the journalist talk of the great men who had failed, the little men who had succeeded in art and literature. Strange that all the good men should have gone to the dogs, while all the little men had been pushing forward to the front.

It was like a game at draughts, in which the white men seem to be winning with a rush, when somehow the black men edge in stealthily here and there, in front, behind, at odd corners, until those splendid white fellows are all pushed off the board. To hear Trottier and Tillet talk, it would seem as if the chief characteristic of true genius were an irretrievable bent toward the gutter.

The journalist's visits in the Rue du Bac were never long. He had to leave at half-past ten in order to write his paragraphs for the next number of the "Taon," to be issued early next morning.

Mlle. Duprez took leave at the same time as M. Trottier, and the journalist offered to escort the two ladies to their hotel, an arrangement which the Frenchwoman had foreseen. The street was very quiet at this hour, and as the pavement was narrow Mlle. Duprez had an excuse for asking Hilda to walk a few yards in front, while she herself talked confidentially with M. Trottier.

"You no doubt think it is very strange that my young friend should be in Paris without her brother's knowledge," she said, tentatively.

"Life is so full of strange events that I have long left off wondering or speculating about them," he replied, easily. "I have no doubt Mees Effcott is a most charming young person."

"Ah, but I want you to know more about her than that. I want you to understand that she is just as good as she is charming. She is brave, unselfish, noble, capable of self-sacrifice, and there are a

good many charming girls who are none of these things. There is nothing underhand in her presence in this city without her brother's knowledge. I, Louise Duprez, give you my word for that, and ask you as a favor to respect her secret."

"I have already pledged myself to do that, *chère demoiselle*. Indeed, I am not likely to see much more of Mr. Effcott. He wanted my help in a matter in which I was at first willing to aid him, but in which I afterward saw peril to a man whom I had known and liked in the past."

"I wished you to know that Mr. Heathcote's sister is in no way unworthy of her brother's love and protection. She is here to break off an engagement which would in all probability have ended unhappily."

"You need tell me no more. Your young friend is in very good hands. Madame Tillet is one of the best women I know—the true heart of motherhood beats under that broad chest of hers. She will take good care of your young friend in this dangerous city of Paris."

They parted at the entrance to the Bon Lafontaine, where mademoiselle and Hilda had two little bedrooms adjoining each other, and where Hilda slept a troubled sleep, worn down by the fatigue of her journey, but haunted by sad thoughts even in the midst of her slumbers."

She transferred herself and her few belongings to the Rue du Bac next morning, and then went with Mlle. Duprez to the Bon Marché, where she bought all she wanted, including two neat little ready-made gowns, one of gray alpaca, and the other of black cashmere, and a black velvet toque which gave her the true Parisian air.

"It was very wise of you to bring so little luggage," said mademoiselle approvingly. "English gowns would have stamped you at once as an Englishwoman, and would have made people stare at you. In those neat little frocks you may pass anywhere unobserved. Except for your fair young face, which is brighter than the typical face of the boulevard," thought Louise Duprez, who did not care to praise her *protégée* too much.

She only stayed to see Hilda fairly installed in her new home, and left Paris by an afternoon train which would take her to Havre in time for the evening boat. She would be at Southampton next morning and at Plymouth in the afternoon. Hilda went to the railway station with her friend, full of gratitude for her kindness, kissing her with warmest thanks at parting.

"Heaven knows whether I have done right or wrong, child, in helping you," said the Quixotic little woman, with a doubtful sigh. "I have allowed myself to be guided by the instinct of my heart, and a woman's heart is not always a wise counselor. If that young man of yours does not care for his wealthy widow, *par hasard*, a nice mess I have helped you to make of two lives."

"But he does care for her. He loved her devotedly for three years. A man can not change all at once," argued Hilda. "And she is so handsome, so aristocratic—fascinating, no doubt, when she chooses. Bothwell could not help loving her."

"Then he ought not to have pretended to love you," retorted mademoiselle, severely.

"That was my fault," said Hilda, with a sigh.

The signal for departure sounded, and the friends said good-by. Mathilde had accompanied Hilda to the station, and had waited discreetly at a little distance during those last confidences. The two girls walked home to the Rue du Bac together, Hilda fearing lest she should run against her brother at any moment.

And now Hilda's new life began in earnest, a life in a strange household, amidst new surroundings. She was to try and find consolation in hard work, in her love of music—to create for herself new interests, if it were possible, while every moment of her life was haunted by the thoughts of the lover she had deserted, and the home that was to have been hers.

She took her first lesson at the Conservatoire on the following morning, and the professor who taught her was very encouraging about her voice and talent. He told her she possessed an organ worthy of the highest cultivation, capable of the grandest development. He put aside the little German song which she had taken with her, and gave her a solo of Glücks.

"You were taught by Mademoiselle Duprez, I understand," he said. "An admirable women, quite an admirable manner—one of Garcia's best pupils, and one of the few women capable of profiting to the uttermost of Garcia's teaching. You have been taught in the best school, mademoiselle, and you have nothing to unlearn. That is saying a great deal. On the other hand, I need not tell you that you have a lot to learn."

"I am sure of that, sir. I have come to Paris on purpose to profit by your instructions."

"With a view to appearing in opera?"

"Oh, no," exclaimed Hilda, blushing. "I have no such lofty ambition. I only want to sing a little better than I do—to amuse my brother."

"That is a very limited horizon."

"And for my own pleasure in good music."

"I see. Art for art's sake. There are very few nowadays who care to work for art in the abstract. I shall be very proud of such a pupil."

Hilda's fresh young face—fresh in its youth—and innocence, even despite the settled sadness in the eyes—her blushes and simplicity, had fascinated the gray-headed singing master. Louise Duprez had hinted at Hilda's story—a broken engagement, a girl's first sorrow. He had been told that his new pupil was an English girl of good family, brought up in a remote province, inexperienced, pure-minded; and he who had for the last forty years been steeped in the vanities, vices, and falsehoods of the great garish city felt his heart drawn toward this graceful, gentle girl with her faint perfume of well-bred rusticity.

"You have a very fine voice, mademoiselle, and it is a great pity you are not obliged to earn your own living," he said, smiling at her, as he rose from the piano. "I shall expect you to sing me that scene in first-rate style next Wednesday."

CHAPTER XXVI.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

To be on the very threshold of Paradise, within the sound of celestial birds, and the perfume of celestial flowers, to be on the point of entering the blissful place, with heart full of hope and pride, and to have the gates suddenly slammed in one's face, and to hear the voice of the angel at the gate crying, "Ye can not enter now," would be perhaps to feel as Bothwell Grahame felt after he had read and read again that calmly worded letter in which Hilda Heathcote renounced him and his love.

His senses staggered under the force of the blow. He cursed Valeria Harborough in the rage of his tortured heart. This was her work. This was the work of that serpent who had beguiled him to forfeit good faith and honor in the past, and who wanted to ruin his life in the present. Those ideas of fortune, of a lofty ambition to be realized through Valeria's aid, which Hilda put forth in her letter, hardly entered into his mind; but had Valeria been able to make him a prime minister or viceroy of India, by a motion of her hand, he would have cared for her no more than he cared for her in her present insignificance, as a well-born widow with so many thousands a year.

The infatuation which once held him was a thing of the past, the glamour was over, the light extinguished. He looked back and wondered that he could have ever been so enslaved, so poor a creature as to worship a thoroughly artificial woman.

His first feeling about Hilda, after reading her letter, was one of anger. He told himself that this renunciation had another motive than that expressed in the letter. It was not in order to give him back to Lady Valeria that his betrothed revoked her promise. It was in order that she herself might escape from an engagement which for some secret reason had become distasteful to her.

"She draws back at the eleventh hour," he said to himself. "Perhaps even at the last she has begun to doubt me—to believe that I may be after all the miscreant my kindly neighbors thought me—the murderer of a helpless girl. Who knows? That idea was rooted in her brother's mind at the time. It may have transferred itself to her mind when she found herself on the eve of marriage with a suspected man. Women are given to curious fancies and caprices; and she—she whom I thought so brave, so noble, so straight—she, too, may have her crooked moments, her waverings, and unstableness, like the rest of her sex."

He read the letter again—tried to project his mind into the mind of the writer, to look behind the words, as it were, and by sheer intensity of thinking to get at the hidden meaning of the writer. No, she was not the unstable being he had been inclined to think her in his first agony of wounded feeling. No, a thousand times no. This letter of hers had been written in all simplicity, in all honesty of heart and mind. She gave him up to another, believing that his

happiness lay that way. And it was Valeria who had done this thing—Valeria who had come between him and happiness. In his savage anger he felt inclined to rush off to Plymouth, to lie in wait for that old idol of his—that false goddess with the feet of basest clay—to insult her before the face of society, to put some public inextinguishable slight upon her.

She was a woman, exempt in her feebleness; and he could do nothing except rage impotently at the thought of her iniquity, gnash his teeth at that inexcusable foolishness of his past life which had made him her slave.

Her slave? No, not her slave; that he would never be. Her victim, perhaps, yes. She might blast his hopes in their fullness; she might ruin his life; but she should never bend his neck to the yoke.

"Her money, her influence! My position as her husband! Are those the baits with which she tempts me to her net?" he said to himself. "How little she knows me; how little she knows the value of a true woman when weighed against a false one. My true love is more to me than an empress. Millions would not buy my allegiance to her."

He went to the inn stables where Glencoe was at livery, and saddled the powerful beast with his own hands, in his eagerness to be on the way to Bodmin. Glencoe had enjoyed a day of leisure and meditation in a very dark stable, and he left the little village of Trevenna in a series of buck-jumps, arching his vigorous back and sniffing the ground with his quivering nostrils, shying ferociously at every stray pig, and standing up on end at a vision of a donkey, until the corrective influence of the spur brought him to a better state of mind, whereupon he collected himself and settled into a grand rhythmical trot.

The hunter was white with dust and foam by the time Bothwell rode him into the stable-yard at the Spaniards; here nothing but disappointment awaited him. He heard that Miss Heathcote had left home early on the previous morning. One of the lads had taken her portmanteau to Bodmin Road, and she had walked there alone, in time for the eight o'clock train for Plymouth, the boy believed. Mr. Heathcote had not yet returned from France. There was nobody at home except Miss Meyerstein and the little girls.

Bothwell asked to see Miss Meyerstein and was shown into the drawing-room, where that worthy woman soon came to him full of trepidation. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping, and her cheeks were pallid with care.

"Mr. Heathcote may think it my fault," she said. "I have telegraphed to him, but there has been no answer yet."

"Do you know where Miss Heathcote was going when she left this house?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. All I know is what the boy told me. I have tried to make the best of things to the servants, for I don't want them to suppose that Hilda was running away; but they must have their own idea about it, knowing as they do that she was going to be married next Tuesday."

"Never mind the servants," said Bothwell, impatiently. "Let them think what they please. But have you no idea where she

would be likely to go—to what friend—in what direction? She can not have so many friends from whom to choose in such a crisis. She would go to the house where she was most sure of a welcome, where she would know that her secret would be kept. What friends has she in Plymouth?"

"None. She never went to Plymouth, except for shopping, sight-seeing, concerts, or something in that way, with her brother, or with me. She knows no one in Plymouth except her old singing mistress."

"She may have gone to her," said Bothwell, eagerly

"Hardly likely. Mademoiselle Duprez lives in two rooms. Hilda would scarcely ask for hospitality there."

"I don't know. She is very fond of Mademoiselle Duprez. I have heard her say so. That is a clew, at any rate. I shall go to Mademoiselle Duprez this afternoon. I must walk across to Penmorval and see my cousin first. She may know more of Hilda's plans than you do."

"That is very likely. Mrs. Wyllard is Hilda's most intimate friend."

"There was a lady came to call upon Miss Heathcote a few days ago," said Bothwell. "Did you happen to see that lady?"

"I did not," answered the fräulein, looking at him curiously. "Yet I can but think that lady had something to do with Hilda's strange conduct. She is an old friend of yours, I believe—Lady Valeria Harborough."

"Yes, I have known her for some years. Was she long with Hilda?"

"She was closeted with her for at least an hour, and from that time to this I have not seen Hilda's face. She went to her room soon after Lady Valeria left. She excused herself from appearing at dinner on account of a headache, and when I went to her room door later in the evening she refused to let me in, and I could hear from her voice that she had been crying. I went to her room again at seven o'clock next morning, for my mind had been uneasy about her all night; but she was gone. I found two letters, one for Mr. Heathcote and one for me."

"Would you be kind enough to show me the letter she wrote to you?"

The fräulein reflected for a few moments, being an eminently cautious person, and then produced Hilda's note from her pocket-book.

"I do not think there can be any harm in showing it to you," she said. "There is so little in it."

The letter ran thus:

"DEAR FRÄULEIN,—Do not be alarmed at my disappearance. I have good and sound reasons for canceling my engagement with Mr. Grahame—not because of any wrong act upon his part, but for motives of my own; and I have decided upon leaving home for some time as the best way of getting over the difficulty. Pray let no fuss be made about this sudden change in my plans. Very few of our neighbors knew anything about the intended marriage, so I hope there will be less talk than there usually is under such circum-

stances. You need have no uneasiness about me, as I am going to act under the advice of a clever and experienced friend, and I mean to be quite happy in my own way, amid new surroundings, and to carry out an old desire of my heart. You shall hear of me directly I feel myself at liberty to tell you more. Always lovingly yours,

"HILDA."

"An old desire of her heart," said Bothwell, slowly, staring at the letter, with the keenest mortification expressed in his countenance.

That cheerfulness which Hilda had assumed in her letter to the governess smote her lover to the heart. A man's mind is not subtle enough to cope with the subtleties of a woman's conduct. Hilda's chief aim in writing that letter had been to hoodwink the fräulein, to satisfy her with the assurance that she, Hilda, was going away from home in tranquil spirits and with hopeful views of the future. Bothwell saw in this cheery letter the evidence of a stony heart, a heart that had never loved him.

"'An old desire of her heart,'" he repeated, with a helpless air. "What can that mean?"

"I haven't a notion," replied the fräulein, reflecting his helplessness upon her own commonplace countenance, "unless it were that she has an idea of going on the stage. So many girls are mad about the stage nowadays. And Hilda is so pretty. I know when we had private theatricals here last Christmas for the twins' juvenile party, everybody was in raptures with Hilda's acting. People told her she would make a great sensation if she were to appear in London."

"People are a parcel of idiots," cried Bothwell savagely. "Yes, I remember the theatricals. I was at the party, you know. And there was a cub who made love to Hilda. Yes, I remember."

The cub in question was the eldest son of a neighboring landowner and heir to a fine estate, but Bothwell had looked on the innocent lad with abhorrence, even in those early days when his attachment to Hilda had been only in its dawn.

"No, she would not think of going on the stage," said Bothwell, after a pause, during which he had paced up and down the room two or three times in an agitated way; "that is impossible. She would not be mad enough for that. There must be something else. The desire of her heart. What can it mean?"

The fräulein could not offer any suggestion, except that idea of the stage. "She is so passionately fond of Shakespeare," she said. 'I have heard her recite the whole of Juliet and Portia without faltering. She has such a memory. I shouldn't be surprised if she were to come out as Juliet at Covent Garden next week."

Miss Meyerstein's sole knowledge of the London stage was derived from biographies of the Kembles and their contemporaries. She believed in the two patent theaters as existing facts, and thought that Shakespearian *débutantes* were appearing and taking the town by storm periodically all the year round.

"I must go to Plymouth by the five o'clock train," said Bothwell, hurriedly. "Will you kindly let my horse stay in your stables and be looked after till to-morrow morning, Miss Meyerstein? I

rode him over here at a rather unmerciful rate, and he'll be all the better for a rest. I shall walk to Penmorval, and get myself driven from there to the station. Good-by."

He had gone before the fräulein could answer him; but that good-natured person rang the bell and requested that Mr. Grahame's horse might be taken care of for the night, and that anything he required might be given to him.

Bothwell found his cousin full of sympathy, but as unable to give him any advice or assistance as Miss Meyerstein had been. To Dora he opened his heart fully, showing her Hilda's letter and breaking out every now and then into angry denunciations of Lady Valeria.

"Hush, Bothwell, don't be so violent," pleaded Dora, putting her hand to his lips. "I agree with you that it was a wicked thing for Lady Valeria to do—to put forward her own weakness in the past and your wrong-doing as a claim upon you in the present. I can understand poor Hilda's conduct. She was only too ready to believe that you must care more for Lady Valeria than for her."

"Help me to find her, Dora, that is all I want. I will soon teach her which it is I love best. But I don't believe she really cared for me. She had some other fancy—some other dream."

"No, Bothwell, no."

"I have seen it in her own handwriting," said Bothwell, moodily, and then he told his cousin of that letter which Hilda had written to the fräuelin, and that curious phrase about "an old desire of her heart."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW SUCH THINGS END.

"AN old desire of her heart," repeated Dora, wonderingly. "What could that be? I am sure she had but one wish in this world, and that was to make your life happy."

"If that had been so, if she had been single-hearted, she would not have been so easily frightened away from me," argued Bothwell. "She would have laughed Lady Valeria to scorn, strong in the power of her own love. No, it was because she was half-hearted that she gave way. There was this old desire of her heart, which could only be gratified by throwing me over."

"Bothwell, you are unworthy of her when you talk like that."

"She has proved herself unworthy of me," retorted Bothwell, savagely. "Perhaps, after all, it was that beardless cub, young St. John, she cared for—an Etonian of nineteen, with a pretty face and missish manners. Perhaps it was of him she was thinking when she wrote about an old desire of her heart."

"Bothwell, I am ashamed of you. Hilda's heart is one of the purest and truest that ever beat in a woman's breast. This very foolishness in running away from her own happiness is only a new proof of her noble nature."

"An old desire of her heart," harped Bothwell; "read me that riddle if you can."

"I can only read it in one way," answered Dora, after a thought-

ful silence; "ever so long before your return from India, Hilda had an ambition to do something great in music. She had been told that her voice was of the finest quality, and only required severe training in order to become an exceptional voice. She wanted to go abroad—to Milan, Leipsic, Paris—she talked of different places in her castle-building—and to give herself up to the study of music and the cultivation of her voice. The only difficulty was that as Mr. Heathcote's sister, and with an independence inherited from her mother, there was no excuse for her taking up music as a profession, while it would have seemed unreasonable to leave her friends and her home merely to improve herself as an amateur. We often discussed this question together, and I used to advise her to abandon the idea of leaving her brother, whose life would have been altogether lonely without her. I told her that if ever Mr. Heathcote married again she would then be free to do what she liked with her life. But, by and by, you appeared upon the scene, and Hilda resumed her love for fox-hunting, and neglected her piano. After this, I heard no more of her yearning for a higher school of music than she could find in England."

"Perhaps you are right," said Bothwell, with a penitent look. "There is only one person to whom Hilda would be likely to go in Plymouth, and that is her old singing-mistress."

"Mademoiselle Duprez; yes, that is a person whom she would naturally consult," answered Dora. "I know all about Mademoiselle Duprez, a sweet little woman."

"Dora, will you let one of your people drive me to the station in time for the next train?"

"With pleasure. But you must have something to eat before you go. You look as if you had not had any lunch."

"I dare say I look very miserable. No, I have not been in the humor for eating since I got Hilda's letter this morning. I walked half a mile to meet the postman in my impatience for my true love's letter, and when it came it was a staggerer."

"And you have ridden all the way from Trevenna, and have had nothing to eat?"

"I forgot all about it, but I will take a crust and a glass of wine before I start. Has Wyllard heard of Hilda's disappearance?"

"Yes; he has been very much troubled about it. He had set his heart on this marriage, and on its celebration while he is well enough to be present. God knows how long he may have strength enough to bear even as much fatigue as that. He is very angry with Hilda."

"He must not be angry with her. It is my sin that has caused this misery. I have sown the wind, and I have reaped the whirlwind. You are very good to bear with me in my trouble, Dora."

She was infinitely patient with him, sitting by him while he took a sandwich and a tumbler of claret, soothing him in his indignation against Lady Valeria, listening to his remorseful confession of wrong-doing in the past, bearing with that most tedious of all human creatures, an unhappy lover. But she had a sense of relief when he was gone, and she heard the dog-cart wheels rolling along the avenue. Her thoughts of late had been so concentrated upon her husband

and his suffering that it was painful to be obliged to think of anything outside that sick-room and its sadness.

Bothwell found only disappointment at Plymouth. The little maid-servant had been thoroughly coached by Mlle. Duprez before she left, and had been warned against any mention of Miss Heathcote.

She faced Bothwell with a stolid countenance, prepared for any enormity in the way of false statements; for she was one of those faithful creatures who, although the soul of truthfulness upon their own account, will lie valiantly to serve those they love. She said that Mlle. Duprez had gone away on business.

"Was she alone?" asked Bothwell.

"Yes, sir."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"But she was to meet some one at the station, perhaps. There was some one going away from Plymouth with her."

"I think not, sir. I feel sure mademoiselle would have told me if there had been any one going with her."

"When was Miss Heathcote last here?" asked Bothwell abruptly. "You know Miss Heathcote—a pupil of mademoiselle's—a young lady from Bodmin?"

The girl put on a countenance of profound thought, as if she were calling upon her memory for a stupendous effort, looking back into the night of ages.

"I'm sure I can't say, sir: but it was a long time ago—quite early in the summer."

"You are sure she was not here yesterday?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Mademoiselle left Plymouth a week ago, and nobody called yesterday."

"Oh, she left Plymouth a week ago, did she, and nobody called yesterday?" repeated Bothwell, with despairing helplessness, at which the slavey's heart smote her.

It seemed a cruel thing to deceive such a nice-looking, outspoken gentleman—about his young lady, too—for it was evident to Mary Jane that Miss Heathcote must have been keeping company with this gentleman, and that she had broken off with him. If Mary Jane's fidelity to the little Frenchwoman had not been firm as a rock, she would have given away at this point, and told Bothwell the truth.

"Kindly give me Mademoiselle Duprez's address," he said. "I have very important business with her, and should like to telegraph immediately."

"Mademoiselle did not leave any address, sir."

"Not leave any address? A woman of business! But she would have her letters sent after her, surely?" urged Bothwell.

"No, sir. Mademoiselle did not wish her letters to be sent. She would be on the move, she said, and she would rather risk leaving the letters here than having them follow her from place to place."

There was an air of reality about these particulars that convinced Bothwell, whereby he showed his inexperience; for liars always go into particulars, and prop up their falseness with a richness of detail rare in truthful statements.

"Then you really don't know where Mademoiselle Duprez is to be found?"

"No, sir; but I am expecting her home at any moment, as you may see. She might walk in while we are standing here."

"I wish she would," said Bothwell. "I want much to see her."

He left his card, and went away, cruelly disappointed.

And now he set his teeth like a man who is going to meet his foe, as he turned his face toward that white-walled villa on one of the hills above the town—that fair and pleasant place where he had dawdled away so many summer afternoons, all the while wishing himself anywhere rather than in that Armida garden, feeling himself a knave and a dastard for being there. He hated the place now with a deadly hatred. It seemed to him that those white walls had been built of dead men's bones, as if the house within and without savored of the charnel.

The good old man—so fooled, so wronged by a false wife and false friend—was gone, lying at rest in the cemetery yonder, and Armida reigned alone in her enchanted garden. Bothwell walked to the villa at his fastest pace, hurrying on with bent brow, unobservant of anybody or anything that he passed on his way, as if he would walk down the angry devil within him. But the devil was not subjugated when Bothwell entered the classic portico. His livid countenance, his gloomy eyes, scared the sleek young footman from his afternoon listlessness.

Yes, Lady Valeria was at home. Bothwell was ushered into the shadowy drawing-room—a place of summer darkness, sea-green plush and tawny satin, an atmosphere of perfume. The vernada beyond the richly-curtained windows was filled with exotics; creamy-white blossoms were languishing in Venetian glass vases on tables and piano. A Japanese embroidered curtain draped the door of an inner room, and, as Bothwell entered, this curtain was lifted by those slender fingers he knew so well, and Valeria stood before him, very pale, seeming taller and slimmer than of old, in her black cashmere gown. She wore no crape to-day, only that plain black cashmere, silkily soft, of densest, most funereal black, falling in straight folds from the graceful shoulders, clasped at the throat with a large jet cross, the thin white arms showing cold as marble under the long, loose sleeves, which fell open from the elbow. The flowing draperies had a conventional air, as of an abbess of some strange order; but the uncovered head, with its coils of soft brown hair, was like the head of a Greek statue.

Bothwell uttered no word of greeting. He took Hilda's letter from his breast-pocket, and handed it open to Lady Valeria.

"This is your work," he said.

She read the letter slowly, deliberately, and not a sign of emotion stirred the marble pallor of her face as she read. She seemed to weigh every syllable.

"A very sensible little letter," she said. "I did not think it was in Miss Heathcote to take so broad and generous a view of our position. She is a noble girl, and I shall honor her all the days of my life. She has cut the knot of a great difficulty."

Bothwell looked at her half incredulously, as if he doubted his own ears.

"Do you suppose that I shall abide by this letter?" he asked, in harsh, husky tones, which made his voice seem altogether unfamiliar to Valeria, as if a stranger were speaking to her in Bothwell's semblance.

"Naturally, my poor Bothwell," she answered, with her easiest air. "I can not think that your engagement to this very good, commonplace girl was ever more than a *pis aller*. You were afraid of your position here, and it seemed to you that the only safety was in a respectable marriage. The young lady has a little money, I understand, just enough to keep the wolf from the door, but not enough for any of the delights of life. And you told yourself that you would do penance for those happy days up at the hills, that you—you, Bothwell Grahame—would settle down into a grinder of mathematics. A curious fancy—like that of some knight of old who, after a youth of passion and storm, turns hermit, and vegetates in a cave. No, Bothwell, I do not for a moment believe that you ever seriously cared for this country-bred girl."

"Your estimate of my feelings in this matter can be of very little consequence to either of us," replied Bothwell, without relaxing a muscle of his moody countenance. "It is Miss Heathcote I mean to marry, and no other woman living. You have stooped so low as to come between me and my plighted wife. You have put off my marriage, hindered my happiness, frustrated the desire of my heart; but nothing that you or any one else can do will lessen my love of the girl I have chosen. If I can not win her back, I shall go down to my grave a broken-hearted man. This is what you have done for me, Lady Valeria."

She was silent for some moments, while she stood looking at him with her pale, fixed face, her large violet eyes, full of reproachfulness.

"This is what I have done for you," she said, slowly, after a long pause. "This is what I have done for you. I have tried to secure to you a life of independence, wealth, the respect of your fellow-men, who in these days have but one standard of merit—success. I have flung myself at your feet, with all the advantages of my birth and fortune—friends who could help you—an assured position. I have offered myself to you as humbly as an Indian dancing-girl, have debased myself as low, made as little of my merits and my position. And all I have asked of you is to keep the solemn vows you made to me under those tropic stars we both loved, in that fair world where we were both so happy. I have asked you to be true to an old vow."

"After you had released me from its obligations, Lady Valeria, after you had flung away the old love-token. Was not that an end of all things between us?"

"It might have been. I accepted my doom. And then fate changed all things. I was free, and there was nothing to hinder our happiness except your falsehood—your double falsehood. You were false to your truest friend, my husband, when you loved me; and now that you could love me with honor you are false to me."

"I am as God made me," answered Bothwell, gloomily, "weak and false in the days gone by, when my love for you was stronger with me than gratitude or honor, but loyal and true to the girl who

won me away from that false love. Shall I go back to the old love now because it is my interest to do so? Oh, Valeria, how you would despise me, how all good and true women would scorn me if I could be base enough to be false to that dear engagement which redeemed me from a false position, which set me right in my own esteem and before my fellow-men. Granted that I have been weak and inconstant, that I have proved myself unworthy of the regard with which you honored me," he went on, with a touch of tenderness in the voice that had been so hard just now, moved to compassion perhaps by that pale, despairing look of hers, "granted that I am a poor creature, you can hardly wonder that my soul sickened against a tie which involved blackest treason against a good man, and my best friend; you can hardly wonder that I welcomed the dawning of a new love, a love which I could confess before the world, and on my knees to my God. That love meant redemption, blessing instead of cursing. And do you think that I am afraid of poverty, or hard work, or a life of obscurity, for the sake of my true love?"

"You have not changed your mind, then?" said Valeria, trying to be supremely cool, though the hectic spot upon that ashen cheek told of passion and anger. "You mean to marry Miss Heathcote, and teach dull lads in a Cornish village for the rest of your life?"

"With God's help, I mean to win back the girl from whom you have parted me, to grasp once more that cup of happiness which you have dashed from my lips. I came here this afternoon to tell you that your work has been only half successful. You have hindered my marriage, but you have not changed the purpose of my life. Farewell, Lady Valeria, and I pray God that word between you and me may mean forever."

"Farewell," she answered, mockingly. "Farewell according to your deserts—truest, most generous of men."

She put her finger on the little ivory knob of the electric bell, and the sustained silvery sound vibrated in the silent house. Then with a haughty inclination of her head, she disappeared through the curtained archway as Bothwell left the room by the opposite door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE WHO MUST REMEMBER.

EDWARD HEATHCOTE had been away from Paris when Miss Meyerstein's telegram arrived at the Hôtel de Bade. He had gone on a journey of something over a hundred miles on the Western Railway, a journey undertaken with the idea of adding one more link to the chain which he had been slowly putting together, one more chapter in the history of Marie Prévol.

He had been disappointed in those who were to have helped him in his task; and it was to his own patience and resources that he was for the most part indebted for such progress as he had made. Drubarde, the ex police officer, had been able to do no more than supply the formal record of the evidence before the *Juge d' Instruc-*

tion. He could throw no light upon the previous history of the supposed murderer: he could offer no clew to his subsequent fate.

Sigismond Trottier, from whose keen wit Mr. Heathcote had hoped for such valuable aid, had broken down altogether. He had failed to furnish any further reminiscences of his old acquaintance Georges.

"I want to know what the man was like," said Heathcote, at their last interview. "If you could put me in communication with any artist friend of yours who knew Georges well, and can remember him well enough to give me his likeness from memory—were it the slightest sketch—I would pay your friend liberally for his work, and be very grateful to you for bringing the matter about."

"I know no such man," answered Trottier, curtly.

"That is very strange. Surely there must be some such person among those who can remember Georges. You say that his only friends were of the literary and artistic world?"

"*Nom d'un nom,*" exclaimed Trottier, impatiently, "I suppose I had better be frank with you. Yes, it is quite possible there may be some one who knew Georges, and who could give you such a sketch as you want. But I will not help you to find that person. I liked Georges—liked him well, mark you. I have profited by his generosity, have gone to him for help when I was in very low water. I am not going to turn and sting my benefactor. Granted that he was an assassin. I can find excuses even for that crime, for I know how he loved Marie Prévol. I am not going to help you to hunt him down. If he is alive and has repented his sin, let him alone, to be dealt with by his Creator and Judge. What are we that we should pretend to judge or to punish him?"

"I have sworn to myself to find the last link in the chain."

"Why should you want to hunt this man down?"

"That is my secret. I have a motive, and a very powerful one. It may be that I have no intention to betray the wretch to justice; that when the tangled skein shall be unraveled and the mystery of that man's life made clear, that in the hour of success I may be merciful, may hold my hand, and keep the murderer's secret from the outside world. But I want to know that secret, I want to be able to stand face to face with that man, and to say, 'You are the murderer of Marie Prévol and her lover; you are the murderer of the helpless girl who went alone to England, having in her possession certain papers which threw too strong a light upon your guilty past. You who have held your head erect before the world, and have passed for a man of honor and probity, you are the remorseless assassin, whose life stands twice forfeited to the law.'"

Heathcote was pacing up and down the room, intensely agitated. He had abandoned himself wholly to the passion of the moment, forgetful of Trottier's presence, forgetful of all things except that one fixed purpose of his mind which had become almost monomania.

"What would you gain by this?" asked Trottier, wondering at this new aspect of his English friend.

"Revenge! There is enough of the old Adam left in the best of us to make revenge sweet. What must it be to one who has lost the one delight that made life worth living?"

"I can not help you to your revenge," answered Trottier. "I was fond of Georges. I hope you may never be able to look in his face and accuse him of the past. I hope he may be spared that shame. I can not for the life of me understand why you should pursue a stranger with such deadly hatred."

"That is my secret, I say again. If you will not help me, so be it. I must go on working on my own account. But the face—the face—that is perhaps the only identification possible. The links of the chain fall into their places—the facts that I have slowly gathered all point to one conclusion, but absolute identification is impossible until I can find a portrait of the man who called himself Georges."

"You are not offended with me, I hope?"

"No, Trottier, I understand your refusal; I respect your loyalty to an old friend. But I must get the portrait I want, somehow, without your help."

This ended all hope of help from Sigismond Trottier. Drubarde, on the other hand, had assured his client that he saw no new clew to the discovery of the missing murderer. If that murderer were indeed identical with the man who met Leonie Lemarque at Charing Cross—if he had surpassed himself in crime by the murder of that helpless girl, it was for the English police to hunt him down. With such a man as George Distin to inspire their movements, the English police—making due allowance for the dullness of a *rosbif* eating nation—ought to work wonders; and here was a case which offered the chances of distinction; here was an assassin going about red-handed, as it were, after a murder not three months old.

"You expect me to find the murderer of Marie Prévol, a man who escaped us ten years ago; and here are your English police who can not find the man who threw Leonie Lemarque out of a railway carriage last July. Is that common-sense, do you think, Mr. Heathcote? No, sir; in Paris I am on my own ground. I know this great city from cellar to garret—her bridges, her suburbs, her quarries, her sewers, and caverns, and waste places, all the holes and crannies where crime and vice have hidden for the last forty years—but from the moment your criminal has got to the other side of the Channel, I wash my hands of him. My talents can serve no further."

Mr. Heathcote recompensed the police officer handsomely for the very little he had done, and so they parted, M. Drubarde vastly pleased with his client, but still better pleased with himself. He was a man whose benign consciousness of his own value in the social scale increased with years.

Having been thus abandoned by both his gifted coadjutors, Edward Heathcote worked on by his own lights. There was one person, he told himself, who might be able to assist him—one person whose chief desire in life must be to see the murderer of Marie Prévol and her lover brought to his doom. Among the few scraps of information which Trottier had given to his friend, there was the fact that the old Baronne de Maucroix, the widowed mother of the murdered man, was still living. She resided at her château in Normandy, where she led a life of strictest seclusion, devoting herself to acts of charity, and to the severest religious exercises.

It was in the hope of obtaining an interview with this lady that

Heathcote left Paris upon the very morning on which the German governess telegraphed the news of Hilda's flight. He had no letter of introduction; no credentials to offer to Mme. de Maucroix, except the one fact of his keen interest in the after fate of her son's murderer. There was some audacity in the idea of so presenting himself before a venerable recluse of ancient family—a woman who, according to Sigismond Trottier, had been distinguished in her youth for pride and exclusiveness—a woman who had ranked herself with the Condés and the Mortemarts, who had ignored the house of Orleans, and loathed the Imperial rule.

The château of the Maucroix family was about five miles on the eastward side of Rouen. It was situate on a ground, a little way from the banks of the Seine—an imposing pile of Gothic architecture, guraded by a moat, and approached by an avenue of funereal yews. The surrounding landscape was flat and uninteresting. The broad bright river, winding in bold curves, across the level meads, with here and there a willowy islet, gave a certain charm to scenery which would otherwise have been without a redeeming feature. Far off in the distance the chimney shafts and spires of Rouen rose dark against the gray October sky.

Edward Heathcote felt the depressing influence of the low flat fields, the gloom of that dark avenue and sunless day. It seemed to him as if he were going into a grave, a place from whence life and hope had fled forever.

He crossed the low stone bridge which spanned the moat, and found himself in an old-fashioned garden of that stately period which gave grandeur to the fountains and parterres of Versailles. Here, too, there were large marble basins, Tritons and Nereids; but the fountains were not playing, there was no pleasant plashing of silvery water-drops to break the dreary stillness of that deserted garden. Everything was in perfect order, not a withered leaf upon the velvet lawns or the smooth gravel paths. But even amidst this neatness there was a neglected look. No flowers brightened the dark borders. There were only the gloomy evergreens of a century's growth, some of them pyramids of dark foliage, others cut into fantastic shapes, an artistic effort of the gardeners of the past, which had been carefully preserved by the gardeners of the present.

A white-haired *maître d'hotel* came out into the echoing hall to answer the stranger's inquiries.

"Madame la Baronne is at home," he replied, stiffly. "Madame rarely goes out of doors, except to her church, or, under peculiar circumstances, to her poor. Madame la Baronne receives no one except her priest."

"I hope that madame will make another exception in my favor," said Heathcote, quietly. "Be good enough to take her that letter."

He had written to Mme. de Maucroix before leaving Paris, and he hoped that this letter would serve him as an "open sesame."

"MADAME,—For particular reasons of my own I am keenly desirous to trace the murderer of your son, and, believing myself to be already on the right track, I venture to entreat the favor of an interview. I am an Englishman, of respectable birth and education,

and I shall know how to respect any confidence with which you may honor me.

"Accept, madam, my respectful homage,

"EDWARD HEATHCOTE."

"To the Baroness de Maucroix."

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAST LINKS.

MR. HEATHCOTE was shown into a room leading out of the hall, the first of a suite of rooms opening one into another in a remote perspective. The doors were open, and the visitor could see to the end of the vista—the parquetted floors, with the cold light, reflected on their polished surface from the high narrow windows, the sculptured pediments above the doors, the crystal girandoles, the somber-looking pictures—all had an old world air, and gave the idea of a house which strangers visited now and then as a monument of the past, but which had long been empty of domestic life, and warmth, and comfort. The far-off echo of his own footsteps startled Heathcote as he slowly paced the polished floor.

He had not long to wait. The *maître d'hotel* appeared after about ten minutes' interval, evidently astonished at the result of his mission, and informed Mr. Heathcote that the baroness would see him.

"Madame la Baronne is old and weak in health, monsieur," said the servant, who had grown old in the service of his mistress, and who worshiped her. "I hope your business with her is not of an agitating kind. She seemed much troubled by your letter. A violent shock might kill her."

"There will be no violent shock, my friend," replied Heathcote kindly, "I shall be obliged to talk to Madame la Baronne of painful memories, but I shall be careful of her feelings."

"I hope monsieur will pardon me for making the suggestion."

"With all my heart."

The old servant led the way up the wide semi-circular staircase to a corridor above, and to a suite of rooms over those which Mr. Heathcote had seen below. They passed through an anteroom, and then entered by a curtained doorway which led into Madame de Maucroix's sitting room, the only room which she had occupied for the last ten years. The *salons* and music-rooms, the library and card-room on the lower floor had remained empty and desolate since her son's death. Her bed-chamber and dressing-room were situated behind this small *salon*, and another door opened into the suite of apartments which had been occupied by her son. These she visited and inspected daily. They were kept in the order in which he had left them, on his last journey to Paris. Not an object, however trifling, had been changed.

There were logs burning on the hearth, although the first chill winds of autumn had not yet been felt, but the baroness kept a fire in her room all the year round. The cheery blaze and a large black poodle, of almost super-canine intelligence, were her only compan-

ions. On an exquisite little buhl table by her arm-chair lay her missal and her "Imitation of Christ." These two books were her only literature.

The poodle advanced slowly across the Persian carpet to meet the visitor, and made a deliberate inspection. The result was satisfactory, for he gave three or four solemn swings of his leonine tail, and then composed himself in a dignified position in front of the fire.

The baroness, who was seated in a deep and spacious arm-chair, acknowledged Heathcote's entrance only by a dignified bend of her head. She was a woman of remarkable appearance, even in the seventy-fourth year of her age. She possessed that classic beauty of feature which time can not take away. No matter that the pale, pure skin was faded from its youthful bloom, that the lines of care and thought were drawn deeply upon the broad brow and about the melancholy mouth, the outline of the face was such as a sculptor would have chosen for a Hecuba or a Dido.

She was above the average height of women, and sat erect in her high-backed chair with a majestic air which impressed Edward Heathcote at once. Her plainly-fashioned black silk gown and India muslin fichu recalled Delaroche's famous picture of Marie Antoinette, and her cast of countenance in somewise resembled that of the martyred queen. But the features were more perfect in their harmony: the outline was more statuesque. In a word, the baroness had been lovelier than the queen.

She motioned Mr. Heathcote to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

"You are interested in tracing the murderer of my son," she said. "That is strange—after ten years—and you an Englishman! What concern can you have in the fate of that man?"

There was the faintest quiver in her voice as she spoke of her son, otherwise her tones were clear and self-possessed; her large dark eyes contemplated the stranger with calmest scrutiny.

"That is in somewise my secret, madame," replied Heathcote. "I will be as frank with you as I can, but there are motives which I must keep to myself until this investigation of mine has come to an end—until I can tell you that I have found the murderer of Marie Prévol—that I have proof positive of his guilt."

"And then, monsieur? What then?" asked the baroness.

"Madame, it is perhaps you who should be the arbiter of the murderer's fate, in the event of such evidence as may be conclusive to you and me, being also strong enough to insure his conviction by a French jury. French jurymen are so merciful, madame, and your judges so full of sentiment, they would, perhaps, regard the death of those two young people—slain in the very flower of their youth—as an outbreak of jealous feeling for which the murderer was to be pitied rather than punished. The law is always kind to the shedders of blood. It is the thief who steals a purse, or the journalist who by some carelessly edited paragraph wounds the fine feelings of our aristocracy—for such as these that assail character there is no mercy. But in the event of my being able to find the assassin and to furnish conclusive evidence of his guilt, what would be your line of conduct, madame?"

The dowager was slow to reply. She waited with fixed brows, meditative, absorbed for some moments.

"There was a time," she said at last, "when I should have been quick to reply to such a question—when I thirsted for the blood of my son's murderer. Yes, when my parched lips longed to drink that blood as the savage laps the life-stream of his foe. But years have worked their chastening influence—years given up to religious exercises, mark you, monsieur, not wasted upon the frivolities of this world. I have sought for consolation from no carnal sources. Pleasure has never crossed the threshold of my dwelling since my son's corpse was carried in at my door. Some people try to forget their griefs; they steep themselves in the venalities of this life; they shut their eyes against the agony of loss. I am not one of those. I have nursed my sorrow, lived with it, lived upon it, until looking back it seems to me that, even in these long slow years of mourning, I have not been actually separated from my dead son. In my prayers, in my thoughts, in my waking and sleeping, his image has been ever present, the most precious part of my existence. I believe that he is in heaven, that such prayers as have been breathed for him, together with the services of the church, must have shortened his time of purgation, that his purified soul is at rest in that blessed home where I hope some day to rejoin him. Confession, penance, mortifications of all kinds have subjugated the natural evil in my character, monsieur. My cry for vengeance has long been dumb. If that cruel murderer yet lives I hope that he may be brought by suffering to repentance. I do not hunger for his death."

There was such an air of lofty feeling, such absolute truth in the tone and manner of Mme. de Maucroix, that Heathcote could but admire and respect this cold serenity of grief.

"He has brought my gray hairs in sorrow to the grave," said the baroness, softly, "but I have been taught to pity all sinners, as our Saviour pitied the worst and vilest, with inexhaustible compassion."

"Madame, if you who so loved your son can be merciful, there is no one living who has a right to exact the murderer's blood. And now forgive me if I venture to question you about that sad story. For the last month I have devoted myself to this case. I have slowly put together the links of a chain of evidence until there is but little wanting to complete the circle. Your knowledge may furnish me with those missing links. Tell me, in the first place, whether you believe—and have always believed—that the man called Georges was the murderer of your son."

"I have never doubted his guilt. There was no one else, no one whom my boy had ever offended. Remember, monsieur, he was but three-and-twenty years of age, amiable, generous, accomplished, beloved by all who knew him. He had not an enemy, except the man whose jealousy he had aroused."

"Did he know the man Georges?"

"Unhappily, yes. Had he never known Georges, he would never have fallen in love with Mademoiselle Prévol. Georges was an intimate friend of an artist whom my son had patronized; a remarkably clever painter, who twelve or thirteen years ago promised to become famous, but who never fulfilled that promise. My boy sat to this Monsieur Tillet for a half-length portrait—the man had a genius

for portraits—and Tillet introduced him to the Bohemian circle in which Georges was living. It was a very small circle, consisting of about half a dozen men in all, mostly journalists and painters. Georges appeared to have a liking for my son; his youth and freshness interested him, he said, in a world where everybody was *blasé*. He invited him to little suppers of three or four intimates, at which Marie Prévol was present. From that hour my son's head was turned. He fell passionately in love with this actress. He thought of her by day and night, abandoned himself utterly to his idolatry, desired ardently to make her his wife."

"He did not believe that she was married to Georges?"

"That was his difficulty. In his love and reverence for her he could not endure to think of her as in a degraded position, yet if she were anything more than the mistress of Georges, my son could never hope to win her as his wife. In his mad, headstrong love for her, he was ready to forgive her past career, to redeem her from her degraded position, and make her the Baroness de Maucroix. He who had been educated in the pride of race as in the gospel was willing to marry an actress with a tarnished character!"

"Did he make you the confidante of his passion, madame?"

"For some time he kept his secret from me, but I knew that he was unhappy, and I knew that there was only one kind of grief possible in such a life as his, where nature and fortune had been alike lavish of their gifts. He had been my companion and adviser from the day of my widowhood, and we were nearer and dearer to each other, and more in each other's confidence than mothers and sons usually are. More than once I had entreated him to tell me the nature of his trouble, to let me help him if that were possible; and he had told me that there was no one but himself who could help him in the great crisis of his life. 'I must be either the happiest or the most miserable of men,' he said. But one night I went into his room and found him ill, feverish, in a half-delirious state, raving about Marie Prévol. This broke the ice, and during the brief illness that followed—the effect of cold, fatigue, excitement and late hours—I obtained his confidence. He told me the whole story of his love for this beautiful actress—how at their first meeting he had been enslaved by her exquisite loveliness, her indescribable charm of manner. He protested that her nature was purity itself, despite her false position. She was the victim of circumstances. And then he told me that Georges spoke of her as his wife, treated her with a respect rarely shown to women of light character—and this thought that his idol was another man's wife filled my unhappy son with despair."

"You warned him of the danger of his position, no doubt, madame."

"Not once only, but again and again. With all the fervor of a mother's prayers did I implore him to escape from his fatal entanglement. I urged him to travel, to go to Spain, Italy, Africa—Algiers was at that time a favorite resort for men of fashion—anywhere so long as he withdrew himself from the fascination which could end only in ruin. But it was in vain that I pleaded. Passion was stronger than common sense, duty, or religion. He was caught on a wheel from which he would not even try to extricate himself."

"And your affection could do nothing?"

"Nothing. From that time my son was lost to me. He shrunk from confiding in me, not because I had been severe—never had I breathed one uncharitable word against the woman he loved. His love made her sacred to me; but I had spoken the words of common sense. I had tried to stand between him and his own folly. That was enough. He loved his madness better than he loved me, he who had been until that time almost an adoring son. When the time came for us to come here for the autumn he refused to leave Paris, and I was too anxious to allow him to remain there alone. I stayed at our house in the Rue de l'Universite, where my son had his apartments, his private keys and private staircase, by which he could come in at any hour without his movements being known to the household. I hardly know how he lived or what he did during those long days of July and August, while all our circle of acquaintance were away by the sea or in the mountains; and while we seemed to be alone in a deserted city. Several of the theaters were closed during those months; but the Porte Saint Martin had made a great success with a fairy piece, and kept open for the strangers who filled Paris.

"I believe that my son went every night to the theater, that he saw Mademoselle Prévol at every opportunity, and that his only motive in life was his love for her. For me the days went by in dull monotony. A presentiment of evil oppressed me, which, waking or sleeping, hung over me like a cloud. Long before the coming of the calamity I felt the agony of an inevitable grief. I knew not what form my misery would take, but I knew that my boy was doomed. When they brought home his bleeding corpse in the summer evening, four-and-twenty hours after the murder, I met the messenger of evil as one prepared for the worst. I had lost him long before his death."

She spoke with supreme composure. She had familiarized herself with her sorrow, lived with it, cherished it, until grief had lost its power to agitate. Not a tone faltered as she spoke of that tragical past. Her countenance was as calm as marble. Every line in the noble face spoke of a settled sorrow, every line had become unalterable as the lines of a statue.

"You say, madame, that the painter, Monsieur Tillet, was upon intimate terms with Georges," said Heathcote. "Is this Monsieur Tillet still living?"

"I believe so. I never heard of his death. He has clever sons whose names are before the public. I have heard people mention them, though I have never seen their works. My knowledge of secular art and literature ceased ten years ago."

"I should be very glad to find Monsieur Tillet," said Heathcote. "He is the very man I want to discover—a man whose pencil could recall for me the face of the missing Georges. You say, madame, that he was an intimate friend of Georges, and that he was a clever portrait-painter. Such a man would not have forgotten his friend's face."

"If you knew what Georges was like, do you suppose you could find him?" asked the baroness, without eagerness, but with a grave intensity, which accentuated the severe lines of her countenance.

"Yes," replied Heathcote. "I believe that in four-and-twenty hours I could lay my hand on the assassin's shoulder and say 'Thou art the man.'"

"In four-and-twenty hours. There is a distance then between you. The man you suspect is not in Paris."

"No, he is not in Paris."

"And if, by any means of Monsieur Tillet's art, you are able to assure yourself of his identity, how will you deal with him? Would you deliver him up to justice?"

"Ah, madame, who knows. Our great poet has said that there is a divinity which shapes our ends—not as we have planned them. If the assassin of your son is the man I believe him to be, he is already punished. He is a doomed man. Joy and hope and comfort are now dead for him. The criminal court and the guillotine could be no harder ordeal than the pain of his daily life. If he is guilty, heaven has not been blind to his sin. The Eternal Doomsman has pronounced his sentence."

A faint flush illuminated the settled pallor of Mme. de Maucroix's countenance, a light sparkled in her eyes.

"I knew that he would not escape," she said, in a low voice. "Heaven is just."

"If you will kindly give me Monsieur Tillet's address, madame, I should be deeply obliged."

"I can only tell you an address of ten years ago. Monsieur Tillet lived then in the Rue Saint Guillaume. He was then in the flush of success, and I have heard my son say that he had a handsome apartment. Where he may live now in his decadence I know not. But his sons are known, and you will have no difficulty in getting information."

"I apprehend not, madame. And, now, if you will permit me, I would ask one more question."

"As many as you please, monsieur."

"Have you in your possssion any scrap of Georges's writing—any note, however brief?"

"No. There was no such thing found among my boy's effects. The police requested that such a letter or letters should be looked for. They, too, were anxious to procure a specimen of the suspected man's writing; but, although I looked most carefully through all my son's papers I discovered no such letter. There were two or three notes from Tillet conveying invitations from Georges, but there was no direct communication from the man himself."

"He was doubtless a man who had taken the old saying to heart," said Heathcote. "*Litera scripta manet.* I have to thank you, madame, for your gracious reception, and, above all, for your candor."

"In a life like mine, monsieur, there is no room for untruthfulness or hypocrisy. My existence moves in too narrow a circle. I have no interest outside my son's grave, and my own hope of salvation. Perhaps, before you leave this house, you would like to see the apartments in which Maxime lived. They have been kept just as he left them when he went back to Paris after the shooting season."

"I should like much to see them," said Heathcote, standing hat in hand before the baroness.

It seemed to him that she had a melancholy pleasure in dwelling on the image of her murdered son; that it would gratify her to show the room which he had inhabited, even to a stranger.

The baroness rose, a tall erect figure, dignified and graceful in advanced age as she had been in the bloom of her beauty, when Charles X. was king. She moved with slow and stately steps toward the door at the end of her *salon*, and led the way into the adjoining room.

It was a large room, richly furnished, and full of such luxuries as a young man loves. Dwarf book-cases lined the four sides of the room. On one side, above the array of richly-bound volumes, appeared a costly collection of arms, both modern and antique. The fireplace was a kind of alcove, furnished with luxurious seats, upholstered in copper-red velvet. Old tapestry, old miniatures, bronzes, curios of all kinds filled the room with endless variety of form and color. A tapestry curtain screened the door of the adjoining bed-chamber. The baroness drew aside the heavy tapestry with her wasted hand, and led the stranger into the room where her son had slept through so many peaceful nights in his happy youth.

A carved ivory crucifix of large size, a *chef d'œuvre*, yellow with age, hung over the pillow on which that young head had so often slumbered. The attenuated form of the Redeemer showed a pallid figure against the olive velvet draperies of the bed. Heathcote observed that the Persian rug beside the bed was worn in the center as if with much use, and he could guess whose knees had left the trace of prayerful hours upon the fabric, as he saw the eyes of the dowager fixed upon that pale figure of her martyred Saviour.

"I have lived half my days for the last ten years in this room," she said, quietly. "I hope to die here. If I have sense and knowledge left me I shall creep here when I feel that my last hour has come."

Over the mantel-piece hung Maxime de Maucroix's portrait, the picture of a bright young face, perfect in form and coloring, but most beautiful on account of the look of hope and gladness that shone in the sunny eyes, the frank, clear outlook of an untainted soul. Heathcote could understand the fascination exercised over a woman like Marie Prévol by such a man as this, with all the adjuncts of rank, talent, wealth, and happiness.

They went back to the baroness's *salon*, and Heathcote took his leave, to return to Rouen, where he stayed the night. He went back to Paris the next day, and found Miss Meyerstein's telegram, and with it Hilda's long and explanatory letter. The girl expressed herself so temperately, with such firm resolve, such generous feeling, that her brother could not find it in his heart to be angry with her for what she had done. He had never desired her marriage with Bothwell Grahame; he desired it least of all now. Wedding-bells would have been indeed out of tune with the dark purpose for which he was working. He had yielded at Dora Wyllard's entreaty; he had yielded because his sister's happiness had seemed to be at stake. But now that she had of her own accord relinquished her lover, he was not inclined to interfere with her decision.

Nor was he alarmed at Miss Meyerstein's telegram, informing him of Hilda's departure in the early morning. His faith in his sister's common sense and seriousness was of the strongest. The tone of her letter was not that of a girl who was bent upon any wild or perilous course of action. He felt assured that she would do nothing to bring discredit upon her name or her family, and that if it pleased her to disappear for a little while, so as to give her lover the opportunity of jilting her in a gentlemanlike manner she might be safely intrusted with the management of her own life.

She was well provided with money, having the check which her brother had sent her a few days before her flight. There was therefore no ground for uneasiness at the idea of her helplessness among strangers. A girl of nineteen, sensibly brought up, and with strong self-respect, and two hundred and fifty pounds in her possession, could hardly come to grief anywhere.

"I wish she had taken her maid with her," thought Heathcote, and this was almost his only regret in the matter.

For not a moment did he doubt that Bothwell would take advantage of his recovered liberty, and go back to his old love. Hilda had dwelt in her letter upon Valeria's grace and distinction, her fortune, and the position to which she could raise her husband. Edward Heathcote did not give Bothwell credit for the strength of mind which could resist such temptations. A weak, yielding nature, a man open to the nearest influence—that was how he judged Bothwell Grahame.

He remembered the young man's conduct at the inquest, his resolute refusal to say what he had done with his time in Plymouth, rather than bring Lady Valeria's name before the public. That dogged loyalty had argued a guilty love; and could Heathcote doubt that when called upon to choose between the old love, and all its surrounding advantages, and the new love, with its very modest expectations, Bothwell would gladly return to his old allegiance?

Assured of this, Heathcote was content that his sister should live down her sorrow after her own fashion. Better, he thought, that she should take her own way of bearing her trouble; just as he himself had done in the days long gone, when the light of his life had been suddenly extinguished. It was not in sluggish repose that he had sought the cure for his grief, but in work, and in movement from place to place. He remembered Hilda's often expressed desire to study at one of the great musical academies of the Continent, and he thought it very likely she had gone to Florence or Milan. He had seen Mlle. Duprez and Hilda putting their heads together, had heard the little woman protest that such a voice as Hilda's ought to be trained under an Italian sky. He could read some such purpose as this between the lines of his sister's letter. This being so, he was content to let things take their course, more especially as his own mind was full of another subject, and his own life was devoted to another purpose than running after a fugitive sister. He wrote a reassuring letter to poor Miss Meyerstein, and he waited patiently for further tidings from Hilda.

His first business after his return to Paris was to find Eugene Tillet, the portrait painter. He had noticed the signature of Tillet on some of the illustrations in the "Petit Journal," and he inquired

at the office of that paper for the artist's address, and for other information respecting him. He was told that M. Tillet lived in the Rue de Bac, with his father and mother, and that he was one of a numerous family, all artistic. His father was Eugene Tillet, who had once been a fashionable portrait painter, but who had dropped out of the race, and was almost entirely dependent on the industry of his sons and daughters.

This made things easy enough, it would seem; but Heathcote remembered his failure with Sigismond Trottier, and he feared that in Eugene Tillet he might perhaps encounter the same loyal regard for an unfortunate friend. Again, Tillet might have been warned by Trottier, and might be on his guard against any act which could betray the assassin whom he had once reckoned among his friends.

It was certain that the painter would remember his friend's face; it was likely that he had some likeness of the missing man in his sketch-book. He was out-at-elbows, idle—a man content to live luxuriously on the labor of others. Such a man would be peculiarly open to pecuniary temptation. He had begun with brilliant successes; had ended in failure and obscurity. Such a man must have suffered all the acutest agonies of wounded vanity, and he would be therefore easily moved by praise.

Arguing thus with himself during his walk to the Rue de Bac, Mr. Heathcote arranged his course of action. He would approach M. Tillet as an amateur, a collector of modern art, and would offer to purchase some of his sketches. This would lead naturally to an inspection of old sketch-books, and to confidences of various kinds from the painter.

As a lawyer and a man of the world Edward Heathcote considered himself equal to the occasion.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he rang the bell on the second floor of the house over the glover's. The *bonne* who answered his summons informed him that M. Tillet, *pere*, was at home. Everybody else was out. The *ci-devant* portrait painter was smoking the pipe of peace by the family hearth, a human monument of departed ambitions, bright hopes that had melted into darkness softly and slowly like the red light of a fusee.

He yawned as he rose to receive his visitor. He stood in front of the hearth, tall, long-limbed, slouching, slovenly, but with a countenance that still showed traces of intellectual power, despite the evident decadence, physical and mental, of the man. His complexion had the unhealthy pallor which indicates a life spent within four walls; and already that pallor was assuming the sickly greenish hue of the absinthe drinker.

"I have to apologize for intruding upon you without any introduction, Monsieur Tillet," began Heathcote, taking the seat to which the painter motioned him, "but although I have neither card nor letter, I do not come to you entirely as a stranger. I was yesterday with Madame la Baronne de Maucroix, a lady whom you must remember, as her son was once your friend."

"Madame de Maucroix, poor soul," muttered the painter, "I am not likely to forget her. I believe that portrait of mine has been of more comfort to her than anything else in the world since her son's unhappy death."

"It is a remarkable portrait," said Heathcote, with enthusiasm.

He was careful to show neither interest nor curiosity about the circumstances of Maucroix's death. He was there in the character of an amateur, interested solely in art.

"It is one of the finest pictures I ever saw," he went on. "Neither Reynolds nor Gainsborough ever painted anything better."

"Monsieur is too good. Your English painters have produced some very fine portraits. There are heads of Gainsborough and Reynolds which leave very little to be desired, though the treatment of the arms and hands is sometimes deplorably flimsy. Your others have not the realistic force of the Paris school. Your Millias has tremendous *brio*, but he paints with a butter-knife. Your Leighton has grace and a keen feeling for beauty, but he is cold and shadowy. So you saw my portrait of poor De Maucroix? Yes, I think it was in my best manner, but it was in the portraiture of women that I was seen at my best. I have been told by too partial judges that the head over the escritoire yonder is worthy of Titian."

"It is an exquisite piece of color," answered Heathcote, rising to scrutinize the unfinished duchess.

"I was a genius when I painted that picture," said Tillet, with a moody look, "but it is all past and done with. I am glad to think you appreciated my portrait of the Baron de Maucroix, a splendid subject, a fine young fellow. May I ask the name of my gracious admirer?"

"My name is Heathcote," said the visitor, laying his card upon the table in front of M. Tillet.

The painter stared at him with a look of extreme surprise.

"Heathcote," he repeated, and then examined the card.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SKETCH FROM MEMORY.

"You seem surprised at the mention of my name," said Heathcote, "have you ever heard it before to-day?"

The painter had recovered himself by this time. He told himself that his visitor was in all probability Hilda's brother, and that it was his duty to his fair young friend to conceal the fact of her residence under that roof.

He was capable of so much perspicuity as this, but he was quite incapable of prompt action. He was too listless to make an excuse for leaving his visitor in order to put the servant on her guard, and so prevent Hilda's appearance before Mr. Heathcote's departure. The chances were, thought Tillet, that the visit would be brief, while, on the other hand, Hilda had gone to the Conservatoire, and was not likely to return for some time.

Having argued thus with himself, the painter was content to trust to the chapter of accidents, which had been of late years the principal chapter in the history of his life.

"If you don't mind smoke," he murmured, with a longing look at his cigarette-case.

"I am a smoker myself, and I delight in it."

On this, M. Tillet offered his case to the Englishman, and lighted a cigarette for himself.

"Yes, I have heard your name before," he said, slowly and reflectively. "I think it must have been my friend Trottier, Sigismond Trottier, one of the contributors of the 'Taon.' He has mentioned an English acquaintance called Heathcote. Perhaps you are that gentleman."

"Yes, I know Trottier," answered Heathcote, far from pleased at finding that the painter and the paragraphist were on friendly terms.

It was not unlikely that Trottier had warned his friend against answering any inquries about Georges.

"Then I think you must have heard a good deal about *me*," said Eugene Tillet, with a satisfied smile. "Trottier knew me when I was in the zenith of my power—glorious days—glorious nights those. The days of Gautier and Gustave Planche, Villemessant, Roqueplan, Xavier Aubryet, the days when there were wits in Paris, monsieur. Ah, you should have seen our after midnight *cénacle* at the Café Riche. How the pale dawn used to creep in upon our talk, and how we defied the waiters, when between two and three o'clock they tried to put out the gas and get rid of us. I remember, how one night we all came with the ends of candles in our pockets, and when the waters began to lower the gas, lit up our candles, a veritable illumination. They never tried to put out our lamps after that. Yes, those were glorious nights, and art was honored in those days. There was a man called Georges, a French-Canadian, I believe; a man of large fortune and splendid brains—he came to a bad end afterward, I am sorry to say"—this with airiest indifference. "He used to give little suppers at the Café de Paris or the Maison d'Or, suppers of half-a-dozen at the most—banquets for the gods. I was generally one of the circle."

"You painted this friend of yours, no doubt," suggested Heathcote, "this Monsieur Georges?"

"No, he had a curious antipathy for sitting for his portrait. I wanted to paint him. He had a fine head, highly paintable. A fine, picturesque head, which was all the more picturesque on account of a particularly artistic wig."

"Do you mean to say that he wore a wig?"

"Habitually. He had lost his hair in South America after a severe attack of fever, and it had never grown again. He wore a light auburn wig, with hair that fell loosely and carelessly over his forehead, almost touching his eyebrows. The style suited him to perfection, and the wig was so perfect that I doubt if any one but a painter or a woman would have detected that it was a wig. He dressed in a careless semi-picturesque style—turn-down collar, loose necktie, velvet coat, and with that long hair of his he had altogether the air of a painter or a poet."

"And you never painted him?"

"Never. I have sketched his head many a time from memory, for my own amusement, both before and after his disappearance, but he never sat to me. I might have made money by giving the police one of my sketches, when they were trying to hunt him down as a suspected murderer, but I am not a Judas, to betray the friend

at whose table I have eaten," said the painter, whose Scriptural knowledge was derived solely from the old masters, and who regarded the disciple's crime from a purely social point of view.

Heathcote was careful to show the least possible curiosity about the vanished Georges. He listened with the air of a man who is charmed by a delightful conversationalist, who admires the *raconteur*, but who has no personal interest in the subject of the discourse. And Eugene Tillet was accustomed so to talk and so to be heard. He was an egotist of the first water, and was not a close observer of other people.

Heathcote was now assured of the one fact which he wanted to know. The painter had made numerous sketches of his friend, and no doubt had some of those sketches still in his possession, as they would have had little value for the dealers. The question now was to get at his sketch-books as quickly as possible.

"The mention of your sketches recalls the object of my visit, which your very delightful conversation had made me almost forget," said Heathcote.

Eugene acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

"I am very anxious to become the possessor of a few of your sketches in black and white, color, pencil—what you will. There is no kind of art that I love better than those first airy fancies of the painter's mind, those jottings of inspiration. I am the possessor of a few very nice things in that way" (this was strictly true), "sketches by Mulredy, Leslie, Maclise, and many other of our English artists. I should much like to add yours to my collection."

Eugene Tillet's sallow cheeks flushed faintly at the compliment. It was very long since any one had offered to buy the work of his brush or his pencil. It was very long since he had touched money of his own earning. And here was an English milord, an enthusiastic simpleton, ready to give him gold and silver for the sweepings of his studio. His pale cheeks flushed, his faded eyes kindled at the thought. His hands were tremulous as he unlocked a cupboard and drew forth three or four dusty sketch-books from the place where they had lain for the last ten years neglected, forgotten, counted as mere lumber.

His hand had long lost its cunning, and, in that slough of despond in which he had gone down, he had lost even the love of his art. It has been said that an artist may lose in a twelvemonth the manipulative power which it has cost him many years to acquire, and it is a certainty that Eugene Tillet's hand could not, for the offer of thousands, have produced anything as good as the worst of the drawings in those half-forgotten sketch-books.

"If we can find anything in either of these books that you would care to have," he said, laying the dusty volumes in front of Heathcote. "But you had better wait till I get them dusted for you."

But Heathcote was too eager to endure delay. He wiped off some of the dust with his cambric handkerchief, and opened the uppermost volume.

The sketches were full of talent, intensely interesting to any lover of art. They were sketches over which Edward Heathcote would have lingered long under other circumstances. As it was he had

considerable difficulty in concealing his impatience and appearing interested in the book in the abstract. He remembered himself so far as to select two pencil sketches of girlish faces before he closed the first volume, which contained no drawing that bore upon the object of his search.

The second was also a blank, but out of this Heathcote chose three or four clever caricatures, which the painter cut out at his request.

"You must kindly put down your own price for these things," he said, as he opened the third volume.

On the second page he saw the face he had been looking for, the face he had expected to see. But, although this thing did not come upon him as a surprise; although that penciled likeness, the last link of the chain, served only to confirm the settled conviction which had lately possessed his mind, the shock was sharp enough to drive the blood from his face, to set his heart beating like a sledge-hammer.

It was so, then. It was as he he had thought, ever since his conversation with Barbe Leroux. This was the man. This was Marie Prévol's lover, and her murderer. This was the cold-blooded assassin of Leonie Lemarque.

He sat silent, breathless, staring blankly at the face before him; a vigorous pencil drawing of strongly marked features, eager eyes, under drooping hair, a sensitive face, a face alive with passionate feeling. The eyes looked straight at the spectator; the lips seemed as if, in the next instant, they would move in speech. The attitude was careless—hands clasped on the back of a chair, chin resting on the clasped hands, the whole bust full of power and intention. Yes, just so might an ardent thinker, an eloquent speaker, have looked at once of those midnight gatherings of wits and romancers. The sketch was evidently an immediate reminiscence, and must have been made when the subject was a vivid image in the artist's mind.

Happily for Heathcote's secret, his agitation entirely escaped Eugene Tillet's notice. The painter was dreamily contemplating the sketches he had just cut out of his book, and thinking what a great man he had been when he had made them.

"I should like to have this one," said Heathcote, when he had recovered himself, "and this, and this, and this," he added turning the leaves hastily, and choosing at random, so as to make that first choice less particular.

M. Tillet cut out all that were indicated to him.

"That is the man I was talking to you about," he said, as he laid the portrait of Georges with the rest of the sketches. "It is a wonderful likeness too, an extraordinary likeness, dashed off at a white heat one morning, after I had been particularly impressed by the charm of his society. He was a man in a thousand, poor devil. A pity that he should have got himself into such a disagreeable scrape later. But he was a fool for running away. He ought to have given himself up and stood his trial."

"Why?"

"Because he would have inevitably been acquitted. You may murder anybody you like in France, if you can show a sentimental motive for the crime, and this business of poor Georges was entirely

a sentimental murder. The verdict would have been 'Not Guilty.' I have no doubt the populace would have cheered him as he left the Palais de Justice, and he would have been the rage in Parisian society for a month afterward."

"But you knew both the victims; you who had received kindnesses from Maxime de Maucroix, surely you can not judge that double murder with so much leniency," expostulated Heathcote.

The painter shrugged his shoulders with infinite expression.

"Maxime de Maucroix was a most estimable young man," he said, "but what the devil was he doing in that galley?"

"And now, if you will kindly tell me the sum total of my small purchases, I shall have great pleasure in giving you notes for the amount," said Heathcote, shocked at the Frenchman's cynicism.

M. Tillet handed him his hastily jotted account. The prices he had put upon his sketches were extremely modest, considering the man's vanity.

The amount came in all to less than a thousand francs, but Heathcote insisted upon making the payment fifteen hundred, an insistence which was infinitely gratifying to fallen genius.

"I shall remember, monsieur, upon my death-bed that there was an Englishman who appreciated my work when my countrymen had forgotten me," he said with mingled pathos and dignity. "Allow me to put up the sketches for you. I do not think you will ever regret having bought them."

While Eugene Tillet was searching among the litter of papers, wood blocks, and Bristol board upon his son's table, in the hope of finding two stray pieces of cardboard within which to guard his sketches, the door was quickly opened, and two girls came into the room.

The first was Mathilde Tillet, the second was Heathcote's sister.

"Hilda!" he exclaimed.

Hilda stood before him in silence, with drooping head, painfully crestfallen.

"Somebody told you I was here," she faltered at last.

"Nobody told me," he answered, smiling at her embarrassment. "I have not even been looking for you, or making inquiries about your whereabouts. Your letter was so very self-assertive, you seemed so completely mistress of the situation, that I felt it would be folly to interfere with you. As I opposed you when you wanted to marry Bothwell Grahame it would be inconsistent of me to oppose your renunciation of him."

Hilda gave a faint sigh. This speech of her brother's was reassuring, but it implied discredit to Bothwell. She would fain have stood up for her true knight, would fain have praised him whom she had forsaken; but she felt it was safer to hold her peace. By and by, when her sarcifice was completed, and when Bothwell Grahame was Lady Valeria's husband, she could afford to defend his character.

"No, my dear child, our meeting is quite accidental. I came here to see Monsieur Tillet's drawings."

"Our young friend is known to you, monsieur?" inquired Eugene Tillet, who had looked on with some appearance of interest at a conversation of which he did not understand a word.

This Mr. Heathcote was evidently Hilda's brother, of whom Mlle. Duprez had spoken before she introduced Hilda to the family circle.

"Your young friend is my sister, monsieur," answered Heathcote; "and since she was determined to run away, I am glad she fell into such good hands."

"And, now you have found her, you are going to carry her off, I suppose," said Tillet. "It will be a pity, for I hear that her talents have made a great impression upon one of the cleverest professors at the Conservatoire, and that she may do great things with her voice if she pursues her studies there. My young people will be in despair at losing her."

"They shall not lose her quite immediately," replied Heathcote, "though, if she is bent upon studying at the Conservatoire, I think it would be better for her to have her old governess to look after her in Paris."

"Fräulein Meyerstein!" exclaimed Hilda. "She would worry me out of my life. She would talk about—about—the past." She could not bring herself to mention Bothwell's name just yet. "My only chance of ever being happy again is to forget my old life. There is some possibility of that here, among new faces and new surroundings. And they are all so kind to me here. Madame Tillet is like a mother."

All this was said hurriedly in English, while M. Tillet discreetly occupied himself putting away his sketch books. Mathilde had withdrawn, and was telling her mother the unpleasant surprise that had greeted her return.

"How did you come to know these people?" asked Heathcote.

"Mlle. Duprez brought me here. She has known the Tillets all her life. She will answer to you for their respectability."

"Well, we will think about it. Let me look at you, Hilda. You are not looking particularly brilliant. It does not seem to me that Paris agrees with you over well."

"Paris agrees with me quite as well as any other place," she answered quietly.

He took her hand and led her to the window, and looked thoughtfully into the sad pale face, with its expression of settled pain. Yes, he knew what that look meant; he had experienced that dull, slow agony of a breaking heart. She had surrendered all that was dearest in life, and she must live through the aching sense of loss, live on to days of dull contentment with a sunless lot. He who himself had never learned the lesson of forgetfulness was not inclined to think lightly of his sister's trouble.

"You look very unhappy, Hilda," he said. "I begin to question the wisdom of your conduct. Do you believe that Bothwell really cared more for this audacious widow than for you?"

"He had been devoted to her for years," answered Hilda. "I saw his letters; I saw the evidence of his love under his own hand. He wrote to her as he never wrote to me."

"He was younger in those days," argued Heathcote. "Youngsters are fond of big words."

"Ah, but that first love must be the truest. I never cared for any one till I saw Bothwell, and I know that my first love will be my last."

"I hope not," said Heathcote. "I hope you have acted wisely in your prompt renunciation. There were reasons why I did not care for the match."

"You surely have left off suspecting him," said Hilda, with an indignant look. "You are not mad enough to think that he was concerned in that girl's death!"

"No, Hilda, that suspicion is a thing of the past. And now let us talk seriously. You have set your heart upon pursuing your studies at the Conservatoire?"

"It is my only object in life."

"And you would like to remain in this family?"

"Very much. They are the cleverest, nicest people I ever knew —with the exception of my nearest and dearest, you and Dora—and Bothwell. They are all kindness to me. The life suits me exactly. I should like to stay here for a twelvemonth."

"That is a categorical answer," said Heathcote, "and leaves me no alternative. I will make a few inquiries about Mr. Tillet and his surroundings, and if the replies are satisfactory, you shall stay here. But I shall send Glossop over to look after you and your frocks. It is not right that my sister should be without a personal attendant of some kind."

"I don't want Glossop. If she comes here she will write to her friends in Cornwall and tell them where I am."

"No, she won't. She will have my instructions before I send her here. She shall send all her Cornish letters through me. And now good-by. It is just possible that I may not see you again before I leave Paris."

"You are going to leave Paris soon?"

"Very soon."

"Then I suppose you have found out all you want to know about that poor girl who was murdered?"

"Yes, I have found out all I want to know."

"Thank God! It was so terrible to think that there were people living who could suspect Bothwell."

"It is horrible to think there was any man base enough to murder that helpless girl—a man so steeped in hypocrisy that he could defy suspicion."

"You know who committed the murder?" inquired Hilda.

"I can answer no more questions. You will know all in time. The difficulty will be to forget the hideous story when you have once heard it. Good-by."

They were alone in the Tillet *salon*, M. Tillet having retired while they were talking. He reappeared on the landing outside to hand Mr. Heathcote the parcel of sketches, and to make his respectful adieux to that distinguished amateur.

"Monsieur, your brother, is the most charming Englishman I ever met," said the painter to Hilda, when his visitor had disappeared in the obscurity of the staircase.

He patted his waistcoat pocket as he spoke. The sensation of having bank-notes there was altogether new. He had been fed upon the fat of the land by his devoted wife; he had been provided with petty cash by his dutiful children; but to touch a lump sum, the price of his own work, seemed the renewal of youth.

"Do you remember the curious name of that picture of Landseer's, *ma chatte*," he said, chucking his wife under the chin when she came bustling in from her housewifely errands. "'Zair is lif in ze all dogue yet.' Zair is lif in ze dogue, *que voici*. See here, I have been earning money while you have been *flanochant*."

He showed her the corner of the little sheaf of notes, coquettishly. She held out her hand, expecting to be entrusted with the treasure; but he shook his head gently, smiling a tender smile.

"No, *mon enfant*, we will not trifle with this windfall," he said; "we will treat it seriously; it shall be the nucleus of our future fortune, *j'acheterai des rentes*."

The tears welled up to his wife's honest eyes—tears, not of gratitude, but of mortification. She knew this husband of hers well enough to be very sure that every *sou* in those bank-notes would have dribbled out of the painter's pockets in a few weeks, and that no one—least of all the squanderer himself—would know how it had been spent, or in what respect he was the better for its expenditure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WAITING FOR HIS DOOM.

LIFE for Dora Wyllard was more than ever melancholy after Hilda's disappearance. The girl's companionship had been her only ray of sunshine during this time of sorrow and anxiety. In her sympathy with Hilda's joys and hopes she had been able to withdraw herself now and then from the contemplation of her own misery. Now this distraction was gone, and she was alone with her grief.

Julian Wyllard had shown much greater anger at Hilda's conduct than his wife had anticipated. He had taken the lovers under his protection, he had been curiously eager for their marriage, had talked of it, and had hurried it on with an almost feverish impatience. And now he would not hear of any excuse for Hilda's conduct.

"She has acted like a madwoman," he said. "When everything had been arranged to secure her future happiness with Bothwell, her devoted slave, she allows herself to be driven away by the audacity of a brazen-faced coquette. I have no patience with her. But if Bothwell has any brains he ought to be able to find her in a week, and bring her to her senses."

"Perhaps Bothwell may not care about running after her," speculated Dora.

"Oh, a man who is over head and ears in love will endure any outrage. He is a slavish creature, and the more he is trampled upon the better he loves his tyrant. It remains to be seen which of the two women Bothwell would rather marry—Hilda, with her rustic simplicity, or the widow, with her slightly damaged reputation and ever handsome income."

"He does not waver for a moment between them."

"Ah, that is all you know; but if he does not give chase to Hilda

you may be sure it is because in his heart of hearts he hankers after the widow."

Bothwell had gone back to Trevenna, intending to pay the builders for the work they had done, and suspend the carrying out of the contract indefinitely.

He would have gone to give them some compensation no doubt for delay; but they were good, honest, rustic fellows, and he was not afraid of being severely mulcted.

Julian Wyllard spoke of Bothwell and his love affairs with the irritability of a chronic sufferer, and Dora listened and sympathized, and soothed the sufferer as best she might. Her burden was very heavy in these days. To see her beloved suffer and to be unable to lessen his pain, that was indeed bitter. And in his case the palliating drugs which deadened his agony seemed almost a worse evil than the pain itself. The constant use of morphia and chloral was working its sad effect, and there were times when the sufferer's mind wandered. There were dreams which seemed more agonizing than wakeful hours of pain. Dora sat beside her husband's couch and watched him as he slept, under the influence of morphia. She listened to his dull mutterings, in French for the most part. He rarely spoke any other language in that troubled state of the brain between dreaming and delirium. It was evident to her that his mind, in these intervals of wandering, habitually harked back to the days of his residence in Paris, ten years ago. And his hallucinations at this time seemed always of a ghastly character; the scenes he looked upon were steeped in blood, doubtless a reminiscence of those hideous days of the Commune, when Paris was given over to fire and carnage. She shuddered as she saw the look of horror in his widely-opened yet sightless eyes—sightless for reality, but seeing strange visions—shades of dread. She shuddered at the wild cry which broke from those white lips—the infinite pain in the lines of the forehead, damp with the wild dews of anguish.

In his waking hours, when free from the influence of chloral, the sufferer's brain was as clear as ever, but the irritation of his nerves was intense. A sound—the slightest—agitated him. A footstep in the corridor, a ring at the hall door, startled him as if it had been a thunder-clap. His senses seemed always on the alert, and there was no middle stage between that intense activity of brain and the coma or semi-delirium which resulted from opiates.

Sir William Spencer had been down to Penmorval twice since the invalid's return, but his opinion had not been hopeful on either occasion. On the second time of his coming, he had seen a marked change for the worse. The malady had made terrible progress in a short interval. And now, on this dull gray autumn afternoon, within twenty-four hours of Heathcote's visit to the Rue du Bac, the famous physician came to Penmorval for the third time, and again could only bear witness to the progress of evil.

Wyllard insisted upon being alone with the physician.

"Sir William, I want you to tell me the truth about my case; the unsophisticated truth. There will be no end gained by your withholding it, for I have read up the history of this disease of mine, and I know pretty well what I have to expect. A gradual extinction, disfigurement, and distortion of every limb and every feature, begin-

ning with this withered, claw-shaped hand, and creeping on and on, till I lie like an idiot, sightless, speechless, tasteless, with lolling tongue, dribbling upon my pillow. And throughout this dissolution of the body I may yet, if specially privileged, retain the faculties of my mind. I may be to the last conscious of all that I have been and all that I am. There is the redeeming feature. I shall perish molecule by molecule, feeling my own death, able to appreciate every change, every stage in the inevitable progress of corruption. That lingering process of decay which other men suffer unconsciously underground I shall suffer consciously above ground. That is the history of my case, I take it, Sir William."

"There have been such cases."

"Yes, and mine is one of them."

"I do not say that. The fatal cases are certainly in the majority, but there have been cures. Whatever medicine can do—"

"Will be done for me. Yes, I know that. But the utmost you have been able to do so far has been to deaden pain, and that at the cost of some of the most diabolical dreams that ever man dreamed."

"Let us hope for the best, Mr. Wyllard," replied the great physician, with that grave and kindly tone which had brought comfort to so many doomed sufferers, the indescribable comfort which a sympathetic nature can always impart. "As your adviser, it is my duty to tell you that it would be well your house were set in order."

"All has been done. I made my will after my marriage. It gives all to my wife. She will deal with my fortune as the incarnate spirit of justice and benevolence. I have supreme confidence in her wisdom and in her goodness."

"That is well. Then there is no more to be said."

Ten minutes later the physician was being driven back to the station, and Julian Wyllard was alone.

"And swift expires a driveler and a show," he repeated, in a tone of suppressed agony. "Yes, that is the horror. To become a spectacle—a loathsome object from which even she would shrink away with averted eyes. That is the sting. Facial anesthesia—every muscle paralyzed, every feature distorted. Oh, for the doomsman to make a shorter end of it all. The face has been spared so far—speech has hardly begun to falter. But it is coming. I found myself forgetting common words this morning when I was talking to Dora. I caught myself babbling like a child that is just beginning to talk."

He took up a hand-mirror which he had asked his wife to leave near him, and contemplated himself thoughtfully for some moments.

"No, there is no change yet in the face, except a livid hue, like a corpse alive. The features are still in their right places, the mouth yet not drawn to one side; the eyelids still firm. But all will follow in its time. If there were but an easier way out of it now, and one could take it, just at the right moment, without being too much of a craven."

He glanced at the table by his sofa—a capacious table, holding his books, his reading-lamp, his dressing-case with all its costly appliances.

"If I did not want to know the issue of Heathcote's inquiries. If— Oh! for some blow from the sledge-hammer of destiny, that

would put an end to all irresolution, take my fate out of my own hands. A blow that would annihilate me and yet spare her—if that could be."

A loud ringing at the hall door sounded like an answer to an invocation. Julian Wyllard lifted his head a little way from the silken-covered pillows and turned his haggard eyes toward the door leading into the corridor.

After an interval of some moments there came the sound of footsteps, the door was opened, and a servant announced:

"Mr. Heathcote."

Heathcote stood near the threshold, hat in hand, deadly pale, grave to solemnity, mute as death itself.

"You have come back, Heathcote?" asked the invalid, with an off-hand air. "Then I conclude you have accomplished your mission, or reconciled yourself to failure."

"I have succeeded in my mission beyond my hopes," answered Heathcote. "But my success is as terrible to myself as it must be to others."

"Indeed. Does that mean that you have solved the mystery of the French girl's death?"

"It means as much and more than that. I have found the murderer of Leonie Lemarque and of her aunt Marie Prévol, and of her aunt's admirer, Maxime de Maucroix. A man must have a mind and heart of iron who could carry the consciousness of three such murders with a calm front; who could clasp his innocent wife to his breast, accept her caresses, her devotion, her revering love—knowing himself the relentless devil that he is! Julian Wyllard, thou art the man!"

"I am!" answered the white lips resolutely, while the haggard eyes flashed like defiance. "I am that man. I have obeyed my destiny, which was to love with a desperate love and hate with a desperate hate. I have gratified my love and my hatred. I have lived, Heathcote, lived as men of your stamp know not how to live; lived with the uttermost drop of blood in my veins, with every beat of my passionate heart, and now I am content to go to the worms!"

"Julian!"

A wail—the agonizing cry of a despairing woman—sounded in the utterance of that name.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"ALIKE IS HELL, OR PARADISE, OR HEAVEN."

It was the despairing cry of a woman's breaking heart that came with that low wailing sound from the curtained doorway. Dora had been told of Heathcote's arrival, and had hurried from her dressing-room on the further side of the spacious bed-chamber. She had reached the threshold of the morning-room in time to hear Heathcote pronounce the dreadful word "Murder," and she had heard all that followed. She had heard her husband's own lips proclaim himself triply an assassin.

"It is my wife's voice," said Wyllard, quietly. "You knew that she was there, perhaps. You wanted her to hear."

"I did not know she was there; but it would have been my duty to tell her all I have discovered. She has lived under a delusion; she has lived under the spell of your consummate hypocrisy. It is only right that she should know the truth. Thank God, she has heard it from your own lips."

"You have not forgotten the day when we were rivals for her love," said Wyllard, with a diabolical sneer. "I won the race, heavily handicapped: and now your turn has come. You have your revenge."

Heathcote was silent. His eyes were fixed upon the figure which appeared between the folds of the dark plush curtain, and came slowly, totteringly, forward to Wyllard's couch, and sunk in a heap beside it. The white, set face, with its look of agony, the widely-opened eyes, pale with horror, haunted him for long after that awful hour. It was he who had brought this agony upon her, he who had unearthed the buried skeleton—he who, going forth from that house to do her bidding, her true knight, her champion, her servant, had come back as the messenger of doom. Was he to blame that fate had imposed this hateful task upon him? He told himself that he was blameless, but that she would never forgive.

"I congratulate you upon your perseverance and your success," said Wyllard, after a pause. "You have succeeded where all the police of Paris have failed. Was it love for my wife or hatred for me that stood in the place of training and experience?"

"It was neither. It was the hand of Fate, the mysterious guiding of Providence, which took me from stage to stage of that horrible story."

"And it was my wife—my redeeming angel—who sent you forth upon your mission, who appealed to your love of the past for your devotion in the present. There is the irony of Fate in that part of the business," said Wyllard, mockingly.

He had always hated Edward Heathcote; he had hated him even in the hour of his own triumph as Dora's accepted lover; hated him because he had once possessed Dora's love, but most of all because he had been worthy of it.

Julian Wyllard's head sunk forward upon his folded arms, and for some minutes there was silence in the room, save for a low and smothered sound of suppressed sobbing from that kneeling figure by the sick man's couch. The face of the husband and the face of the wife were alike hidden. Dora's head had fallen across her husband's knees, her hands clasped above the dark coils of silky hair, in an attitude of consummate agony.

Heathcote stood a little way off, feeling as if he were in the presence of the dead. The mystery of those two hidden faces oppressed him. He almost hated himself for what he had done. He felt like an executioner—a man from whom the State had exacted a revolting service.

"Julian, is this true?" murmured Dora, after a long silence. "Is all, or any part of this dreadful story, true?"

He looked up suddenly, as if vivified by the sound of her voice.

"What would you think of me if it were all, or any of it true?" he asked, hoarsely. "Look up, Dora. Let me see your eyes as you

answer me. I want to know how I am to stand henceforth in the sight of the woman who once loved me?"

She lifted her head and turned her death-like face toward him, tearless, but with a look of agony deeper than he had ever seen before on any human countenance.

That other look, that last look of Leonie Lemarque's which had haunted him waking or sleeping ever since the fifth of July, had been a look of horrified surprise. But here there was the quiet anguish of a broken heart.

"Who once loved you," she echoed. "Do you think such love as mine can be thrown off like an old gown? Tell me the truth, Julian—it can make no difference to my love."

Julian Wyllard's head sunk back upon the heaped-up pillows, and he remained for some moments gazing dreamily at the low wood fire opposite his couch, looking into the pages of the past.

"Yes, your story is put together very cleverly," he said, "and it is for the most part true. Yes, I am the murderer of Marie Prévol—I am that jealous devil, who in an access of fury destroyed the life that was dearer than his own. It was not that I believed her guilty. No, it was the agonizing knowledge that her love had gone from me, in spite of herself, had gone to that younger, brighter, more fascinating lover. I saw the gradual working of the change—saw coldness, dislike even, creeping over her who had once plenteously returned my love—saw that my company was unwelcome, my departure a relief. She who of old had followed me to the threshold, had hung upon me with sweetest caresses at the moment of parting, now could scarce conceal her indifference, her growing aversion. I saw all this, and Satan took possession of me. Again and again I was on the verge of unpremeditated murder. My eyes grew dim, veiled by a cloud of blood; but I held my hand before the deed was done. I have had my grip upon her throat; that milk-white throat, which was purer of tint and lovelier of form than the choicest gems I could buy to adorn it. I have seen the pleading eyes looking into mine, asking me for mercy, and I have fallen at her feet and sobbed like a child. But there came a time when this sullen devil of jealousy and hatred took a firmer hold of me, and then I swore to myself that they should both die. There was no help—no other cure. If she lived she would leave me for Maucroix. She, the wife I had honored, would sink into the mistress of a fop and a fribble, to be cast off when his fancy staled. I knew that was inevitable, so I made up my mind all of a sudden, when I heard of her intended jaunt to Saint-Germain, from the spy I had employed to watch her. I put my revolver in my pocket, and followed her to the station, disguised by a pair of dark spectacles and a style of dress in which she had never seen me. I stood by the doorway of the waiting-room and saw her sitting side by side with her favored lover, they two as happy and as absorbed in each other as two children at play in a garden. You know all the rest. Yes, it was I who watched in front of Henri Quatre, saw those two laughing together in the candle-light—it was I who sprung out of the thicket in the forest, and shot them down, one after the other, left them lying there, side by side, dead. I had a strange wild sense of happiness as I rushed away into the depths of the wood—a sense of tri-

umph. I had won my love from her new lover. She had been mine only, and she would be mine now until the end. I had saved her from her own weakness—saved her from the dishonor which her folly must soon have made inevitable."

He paused for a few moments, but neither Dora nor Heathcote spoke, and after the briefest silence he went on with his confession.

"I never meant to survive my beloved, except just so long as would be necessary to put my affairs in order, and to transfer my securities to England, where those of my own flesh and blood might profit by my fortune. In order to do this, I got quickly back to Paris, and decided to take up the threads of my business life with a view to closing the book forever. You know enough of my character and my history to know that I have a perfect command over my emotions, and you will therefore believe that I was able to go about my daily business, to mix with my fellow-men, with as serene a manner and countenance as if not a ripple of passion had crossed the stagnant surface of my dull, plodding nature. I had so trained myself that the man of passion and emotions was one being, and the man of business another—a creature totally apart. And now, for a while at least, the man of feeling was dead and buried, and only the money-making automaton remained.

"It happened at that time that a cloud of disaster swept over the Paris Bourse. Had I wound up my affairs at that period, I should have been a heavy loser; and I, to whom the science of finance was a passion, could not submit to losses which I knew how to avoid. So I delayed the settlement of my affairs, and even allowed myself to be tempted into fresh enterprises. Yet scarcely a night passed on which I did not look at my pistols before I lay down to rest, and long for the time when I should feel myself free to end my miserable life."

"And in those days you went frequently to the cemetery to place your tribute of roses on your victim's grave?" said Heathcote.

"It was the only respect I could show to the woman my love had killed," answered Wyllard; "the only token of respect for my wife."

"Your wife?" exclaimed the other. "Then Barbe Girot was right in her supposition. You loved Marie Prévol well enough to marry her?"

"I loved her too well to degrade her," answered Wyllard. "It was in the flood tide of my financial success, when I was almost drunk with fortune, and had not one thought above money-making, that Marie Prévol's face awakened me to a new life. That lovely face—so like yours, Dora—yes, it was the likeness to my good angel of the past that drew me to you, my good angel of the present, my comforter, my better self. Oh, but for that second unpremeditated crime, the evil work of a moment's savage passion, I might have gone down to the grave in peace, believing that I had expiated that first murder, atoned for that double bloodshed by the agonies that had gone before and after it. But that last crime wrecked me, it revealed the blackness of my diabolical nature—a nature in which the evil is inherent, the good only the effect of education and surroundings.

"Yes, she was my wife, and I gave her all honor and reverence

due to a wife, though it was my caprice, my false pride perhaps, to keep my relations with her a profound secret. I had won my reputation in Paris as the stolid, unemotional Englishman, a man of iron, a creature without passions or human weaknesses, a calculating machine. It was this reputation which had helped most of all to bring me wealth. To be known all at once as the lover and the husband of a beautiful actress, would have been social, and might have been financial ruin. The men who had trusted me with their money to stake on the speculator's wheel of fortune would have withdrawn their confidence. I should have been left to fight single-handed on my own capital, and my own capital, large as it was by this time, was not large enough for my schemes. The Crédit Mauresque was then in the front rank of public favor, and it was generally considered that I was the Crédit Mauresque. Any weakness on my part and the bubble would have burst. So I planned for myself a dual existence. By day I was the cool-headed financier: but when the stars were high and the lamps lighted I was Georges, the American-Parisian, the Eccentric and Bohemian — the friend and entertainer of a little band of choice spirits, journalists, musicians, painters—the lover, husband, slave of Marie Prévol. Ah, Dora, for the first two years of that strange life there was compensation in it for all the restraints of the day, for the anxiety, the fever, the fret of a speculator's hazardous career.

"Yes, she was my wife. I married her in a village church in the lake country, a quiet little church half hidden among the hills which encircle Derwentwater—a sweet spot. Do you remember once asking me to take you to the English lake, Dora? I had to invent an excuse for refusing. I could not revisit those scenes, even with you."

Again there was silence, broken only by the sound of Dora's weeping. She was still on her knees beside her husband's couch; her hand still clasped his. Not all the horror that had been revealed to her could change her love to hate or scorn. Deepest pity filled her breast. She, to whose nature deeds of violence were altogether alien, could yet enter into and sympathize with the feelings of this sinner whose fatal passions had sunk him in an abyss of crime. She pitied him and clung to him, ready with words of comfort whenever such words might be spoken. Even in her silence the very touch of her hand told of consolation and of pity.

"I married my love in that quiet village church; married her under my assumed name of Gustav Georges, but the marriage was sound enough in law, and for me it meant a life-long bond. I had found Marie Prévol pure and innocent in the tainted atmosphere of a Parisian theater, a creature incapable of guile. I honored her for that innate purity which was independent of surroundings and circumstances, which had passed unscathed through the fiery furnace of Parisian life. The first years of our wedded life were full of happiness, steeped in a love which knew no change or diminution. My darling seemed to me, day by day, more adorable, and it may be that the secrecy of my double life, the long hours of severance, the narrow circle in which Marie and I lived when we were together—it may be that these circumstances and the strangeness of our relations intensified my passion, lending to our calm

domestic bliss all the charm of mystery and romance. Ah, how sweet were our brief holidays by the Mediterranean, our wanderings in picturesque old Spain, far away from the beaten tracks, choosing always those places to which the world did not go. So far as it went, that life of ours was a perfect ilfe; and I was fool enough to think that it would last forever."

He sighed, and sunk for some moments into a dreamy silence, his eyes fixed in a vision of that past existence.

"My wife had an intense delight in the theater and her successes there. She was never a famous actress, but her beauty had made her the rage. She had a bird-like soprano voice and a bewitching manner. She was one of those adorable actresses who enchant their audience without ever losing their own individuality. She was always Marie Prévol; but the public wanted her to be nothing else. As I kept her entirely secluded from society for my own reasons, I could not deny her the pleasure of pursuing her profession. It pleased her to earn a handsome salary, to know that she was not entirely dependent on me, to be able to help her mother, who was a harpy, continually taking money from me. So she remained on the stage, to my destruction; for it was there that Maucroix saw her, and it was because she was an actress that he dared to pursue her with attentions which she at first repulsed, but which she afterward encouraged.

"No, Dora, I will not dwell upon that hideous time, those days and nights of madness and despair. I saw her love going from me. I saw the subtle change from love to indifference, from indifference to fear, from fear to disgust, and then horror. She was kind to me still, from a sense of duty—meek, obedient, a gentle, yielding wife. But I have seen her shiver at my approach, I have felt her hand grow cold in mine; I had found repulsion instead of warm, confiding love. Nor was I allowed long to remain in ignorance as to the cause of the change. A kind friend of mine was also an acquaintance of Maucroix. He informed me of the young man's passion for Marie, of his having sworn to win her, at any cost—yes, even at the cost of the coronet which he had the power to bestow upon her. He was independent, rich, able to do as he liked with his life. He was one of the handsomest young men in Paris, and was said to be the most fascinating. And I was a hard-headed man of business, anxious, brain weary, long passed the finish of hopeful youth. Could I wonder that Marie turned from me to her young adorer? I gave her all credit for having struggled against her infatuation, for having been true as a wife even to the last; but she had ceased to love me, and the day was at hand when the barriers would be broken, when that impassioned woman's heart of hers, that fond, impulsive nature whose every pulse, I knew, would yield at a breath, and she whom I worshiped would fall to the blackest depths of sin.

"Then, like Othello, I called this deed which I had to do, a sacrifice and not a murder.

"You have heard the story of my crime from the lips of your friend here. He has unraveled the tangled skein with a wonderful ingenuity. Yes, it was I who laid those roses on my victim's grave. I stayed in Paris long enough to save appearances, the man Georges

being supposed to have fled to the utmost ends of the earth. I went about among my fellowmen on the Bourse and in the clubs, and heard them talk of Marie Prévol's murder. Once I was told, by a man who had met me as Georges, of my likeness to the supposed murderer; but those few chosen friends who had known me as Georges were not men to be met on the Bourse or financial circles, and I had always eschewed mixed society. My identity with the murderer was never suspected. I saved my fortune, wound up my affairs, and left Paris, as I thought forever; went forth from that accursed city as I would have gone out of hell. I went back to England with the brand of Cain, not upon my brow, but upon my heart. I wandered in a purposeless fashion from place to place, possessed of a restless devil. I had my office in London, where I tried to find a distraction in the excitement of speculation, the financial strategy that had once been my delight. Vain the effort. I was no happier in London than I had been in Paris, within a few minutes' walk of the house that had sheltered my wife, the secret home in which I had been so happy.

"Haunted always by the same dark thoughts, seeing only one image amidst every change of surroundings, I came at last to this fag-end of England. The rugged scenery, the wild coast-line, the sparsely populated moors and fells pleased me better than anything I had seen on this side of the Channel. The landscape harmonized with my melancholy thoughts, and exercised a soothing influence upon my mind. I became more reconciled to my life. Conscience, as you, Dora, or you, Heathcote, may accept the word, had troubled me but little. I had exercised what I held to be a right—a right to slay the woman who had broken my heart, the man who had spoiled my life. I was oppressed by no particular horror at the thought of blood-guiltiness. The agony from which I suffered was the loss of Marie's love, the loss of the woman who had once filled my life with happiness.

"I took to your native soil, Dora. It might be a foreshadowing of the love which was to gladden my latter days. My mind grew clearer, the burden seemed to be lifted from me. And then in a happy hour I met *you*.

"Do you remember that first meeting, Dora?"

"Yes, I remember," she said softly, her head drooping upon her husband's pillow, her face hidden, an attitude of mourning, like a marble figure bending over a funeral urn.

"It was in the picture-gallery at Tregony Manor. I had been taken there as a stranger by the rector of the parish to see a famous Wouverman. Your mother received me in the friendliest spirit, and while we were talking about her pictures you appeared at the other end of the gallery, a girlish figure in a white gown, carrying your garden hat in your hand, surprised at seeing a stranger."

"I remember how you started, how oddly you looked at me," murmured his wife.

"I was looking at a face out of the grave—the face of Marie Prévol; younger, fresher, but not more innocent in its stainless beauty than Marie's face when I first knew her. The likeness is but a vague one, perhaps, a look, an air, but to me at that moment it struck home. My heart went out to you at once. If my murdered

wife had come back to me in some angelic form, had offered me peace, and pardon, and the renewal of love, I could not have surrendered myself more completely to that superhuman bliss than I surrendered myself to you. I loved you from the first, and swore to myself that you should be mine. I do not think I used any dishonorable arts in order to win you."

"You knew that she was the betrothed of another man--knew that your hands were stained with blood," said Heathcote, with suppressed indignation. "Was there no dishonor in tempting a pure-minded girl with your love? You, whose heart must be as a charnel-house!"

"I had put every thought of that dark past behind me before I entered Tregony Manor. Was I a different man, do you think, because in one dark hour of my life I had sinned against the law of civilized society, and revenged my own wrongs according to the universal law of unsophisticated humanity? I loved my new love not the less dearly because of that crime. I loved her as women are not often loved. Dora, speak to me. Tell me if I have ever failed in any duty which a husband owes to an idolized wife? Have I ever been false to the promises of our betrothal?"

"Never! never! my beloved," murmured the low, mournful voice.

"We might have lived happily to the end, perhaps, had Fate been kinder. I had my dark dreams now and again, acted over my past crime, my old agonies, in the helplessness of slumber; but this was but a transient evil. My darling's influence could always soothe and gladden me, even in the darkest hour. All went well with me, better, perhaps, than life goes with many a better man—until the fatal hour when I received a letter from Marie Prévol's mother, written on her death-bed, asking me to find a home in England for her orphan granddaughter—the child I had heard of in the Rue Lafitte, and who had often stayed there as Marie's pet and plaything, but whom I had scrupulously avoided at all times.

"I answered the letter promptly, in my character of a friend of the missing Georges. It was in this character that I had contrived from time to time to send money for the relief of Madame Lemarque's necessities. I sent money to bring the girl to London, and arranged to meet her at the railway station. That was when I went ostensibly to buy the famous Raphael, Dora. I was somewhat uncertain as to my plans for the girl's future; but I meant kindly by her, I had no thought but of being kind to her. If she should prove an amiable girl, with pleasing manners, my idea was to bring her to this neighborhood, to get her placed as a nursery governess somewhere within my ken, to introduce her to you, and to secure your kindness and protection for her. I had paid for her education at a convent in Brittany, I had been told that she left the convent with an excellent character. She was the only link remaining with the terrible past, the only witness of my crime; but I had been told that after her illness all memory of that crime had left her. I had been assured that I should run no risk in having her about me."

"Poor child," said Dora, with a stifled sob, recalling that sum-

mer evening when Julian Wyllard came out of the station, a little paler than usual, but self-possessed and calm, telling her in measured tones of the calamity upon the line—the strange death of a nameless girl.

"I met her at Charing Cross in the early summer morning," he continued quietly. "She was flurried and frightened, so frightened by the strange faces and the strange language round about her that she forgot to tell me of the bag she had deposited in the waiting-room. But I succeeded in putting her at her ease with me, and while she was taking breakfast with me in a private room at the hotel, she told me all about her grandmother's death, and her own education in the convent; what she could do in the way of teaching. She was frank and gentle, and seemed a good girl, and I had no thought but to do the very utmost for her advantage. I could have pensioned her and made her independent of all service; but I considered that for a friendless girl there could be no better discipline than the necessity of earning a living under reputable circumstances, and protected by powerful friends.

"We drove together to Paddington—as your cabman informed you," continued Wyllard, addressing himself for an instant to Heathcote, whom he for the most part ignored, making his confession to the heart-broken wife, whose low, stifled sobbing sounded in his ear now and again as he spoke. "At Paddington I took a second-class ticket for Plymouth, not quite resolved as to whether I should take the girl on at once to Bodmin, or leave her in the care of the wife of my frame maker at Plymouth, a kind soul who would, I knew, be faithful to any trust I reposed in her. I put my *protégée* in a second-class carriage, in the care of some friendly people, and I rode alone in a first-class compartment. I wanted to be free to think out the situation, to decide on my line of conduct. I knew that she had a packet of my letters—my early letters to Marie Prévol, written without reserve, out of the fullness of my heart—letters identifying me with the man Georges. It was vital that I should get these letters from her before she left the railway carriage. Yes, with a curious weakness, I delayed making the attempt till we came to Plymouth. There would be fewer people in the carriages then, I thought. It would be easier for me to be alone with Leonie. I had by this time decided upon taking her on to Bodmin, and finding her a temporary home in my steward's family.

"At Plymouth I left my compartment, intending to go straight to the second-class carriage in which I had placed Leonie; but on the platform I was met by people I knew, who detained me in conversation till the train was within two minutes of starting. While I was talking to these people I saw Leonie wandering up and down the platform in an aimless way, perhaps looking for me. I had told her that I would let her know when she had come to the end of her journey, and now she was mystified by the delay, and feared that I had forgotten her. About one minute before the starting of the train I escaped from my troublesome friends, and got into an empty second-class, into which I beckoned Leonie as she came along the platform.

"We crossed the bridge and came into Cornwall; and now there was but the shortest time for me to explain my views as to the girl's

future, and to get from her those fatal letters which told the history of my love for Marie Prévol, my double life as her husband, and which, by the evidence of my own handwriting, identified me with her murderer. I was determined that Leonie should not leave the train with that packet in her possession, but I anticipated no difficulty in getting it from her.

"I told her my views, promised her that I would be to her as a guardian and friend, so long as she should deserve my protection, assured her that the happiness and prosperity of her future life were contingent only on her own conduct. And then I asked her for the packet which Madame Lemarque had told her to deliver to me. But to my astonishment she refused to give it to me. Her grandmother had told her that she was never to part with those letters. She was to keep the packet unopened so long as I was kind to her; so long as she was protected by my care; but if at any time I withdrew my help from her, and she was in difficulty or want, she was then to open the packet and read the letters. Her own good sense would tell her how to act when she had read them. In a word, the letters were to remain in this girl's possession as a sword to hang over my head.

"I tried to make the girl understand the infamy of such a line of conduct—tried to make her see that her grandmother had schooled her in the vilest form of *chantage*. 'You see me willing to help you freely, generously, for the sake of an old friend,' I said; 'and surely you would not use these letters as a lever to extort money from me.' All my arguments were useless. The discipline of the convent had taught the girl blind and implicit obedience to priests and parents. She would not consider anything except the fact that certain instructions had been given to her by her dying grandmother, and that her duty was to obey those instructions.

"I was patient at the beginning, but the unhappy creature's dogged resistance made my blood boil. Passion got the better of me. I caught her by the shoulder with one hand, while I snatched the packet from her feeble grasp with the other. I was beside myself with rage. As I bent over her, holding her as in a vise, she gave a sudden shriek, expressing horrified surprise.

"'The face in the wood,' she cried, 'the murderer, the murderer.'

"My hand relaxed its grip, she broke from me, and I dashed open the door of the carriage. 'I will tell,' she gasped, in strange, suppressed tones, full of concentrated fury. 'You shall not escape. Yes, I remember your face now—the face I saw in my dreams—the savage face in the wood.'

"She was on the foot-board, clinging to the iron by the window, muttering to herself like a mad thing. God alone knows what she meant to do. She wanted to make my crime known, to bring the train to a standstill, to have me arrested then and there. While she stood wavering on that narrow ledge, her life hanging by a thread, the train rounded the curve and passed on to the viaduct. The stony gorge was below, deep and narrow, like an open grave—tempting me—tempting me as Satan tempts his own. One sudden movement of my arm, and all was over. I had held her, for the first few moments. I had tried to save her. Had she been reason-

able I would have saved her. But there was no middle course. Ruin, unutterable ruin for me, or death for her. One motion of my arm, and she was gone. Light as thistle-down the poor little figure fluttered down the gorge. Another minute and the train stopped. I had my railway key ready before the stoppage, and did not lose an instant in getting along the off-side of the line back to the compartment I had left. Every head without exception was turned toward the side on which the girl had fallen. The only witness of my crime had been destroyed, and my letters were safe in my own keeping, to be burned at the earliest opportunity."

"You burned them that night," said Dora. "I remember. And that tress of hair which you were looking at when I went into the library—"

"Was cut from Marie's head after death. The mother had placed it among those fatal letters. That night, after an interval of years, I touched the soft bright hair on which my hand had so often lingered in adoring love—that lovely hair which my hand had stained with blood."

There was no more to be told. An awful silence followed—a silence in which even Dora's sobs sounded no more. There was a tearless agony which was deeper than that passion of tears.

She rose from her knees and turned toward Heathcote, white to the lips, icy cold, looking at him as if he had been a stranger, and as if she expected no more mercy from him than from a stranger.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "You have come here alone; but perhaps there are people waiting outside—policemen, to take my husband to prison. He can not run away from them; your victim is quite helpless."

"My victim? Oh, Dora, how cruel that sounds from you!"

"Yes, I know," she said, hurriedly. "I asked you to find out the mystery of that murder, and you have obeyed me. My husband—my husband an assassin," she cried, flinging her clasped hands above her head in an access of despair, "my husband whom I believed in as the noblest and best of men. He was tempted to blackest sin—tempted by the madness of jealousy—wrought upon afterward by a sudden panic. He was not a despicable sinner—not like the man who poisons his friend, or who kills the helpless for the sake of gold. It was an ungovernable passion which wrecked him—it was a fatal love which led him to crime. Heathcote," falling at his feet with a wild cry of appeal, "have mercy on him, have mercy. Think of his helplessness. Remember how low he has been brought already. Have mercy."

Heathcote lifted her from her knees, as he had done once before in his life, when she pleaded to him for pardon for her own falsehood.

"I would have mercy upon a snake if you loved it, Dora," he said. "Neither you nor your husband have anything to fear from me. Parisian juries are very merciful; but I will not submit Mr. Wyllard to the inconvenience of a trial. As for the episode upon the railway, we will try to think *that* an accident, an unlucky impulse, unpremeditated, falling considerably short of murder. No, Mrs. Wyllard, I do not intend to deliver up your husband to the law. The one person who has the highest right to cry for vengeance

has learned the sublimity of submission to the Divine will. I have seen the widowed mother of Maxime de Maucroix, and from her lips I have heard the reproof of my own revengeful feelings. But although I am content to be silent, it would be well for Julian Wyllard, when he shall feel the hand of death upon him, to write the admission of his guilt; since that alone can thoroughly clear your Cousin Bothwell before his fellow-men. So dark a suspicion once engendered may hang over a man for a lifetime."

"My confession shall be written before this maimed hand of mine is still forever. My wife's kinsman shall not always bear the burden of my sin," said Wyllard. "I thank you, Heathcote, for your mercy to a fallen foe. A wretch so abject, so smitten by the hand of Fate, would be too mean a creature for your revenge. You are not like the noble Achilles, and would hardly care to drag a corpse at your chariot wheel, and wreak your rage upon impotence. The play is played out, the lights are down. Let the curtain fall in decency and in silence. For *her* sake be merciful."

"Make your peace with your offended God, if you can," answered Heathcote. "You have nothing to fear from me."

He moved slowly toward the door, and at last turned and held out his hand to Dora. She hesitated for an instant, looking at her husband.

"Give him your hand, Dora," said Wyllard. "I can bear to see you clasp hands with the man who has read the riddle of Leonie Lemarque's death. I have come to a stage at which life and death make but little difference to me, and even shame is dead. Give him your hand. You may need his friendship and protection some day when I am underground, and when people look at you with a morbid interest, as the murderer's widow. It will be wise to shuffle off my tainted name as soon as you decently can. Change it for a better, Dora."

"Julian, how can you be so cruel?"

She was by his side again, with her hand in his, forgetful of all things except her love for him, her pity for his pain. All her natural horror at his guilt was not strong enough to extinguish her love for him, to lessen her compassion. As she had pitied him for his physical infirmity, so she now pitied him for his mental infirmity—a mind swayed to crime by undisciplined passions.

Heathcote left the room without another word. He had come there as the messenger of fate. He had no further business in that house.

He had heard from the butler that Sir William Spencer and the local physician had been in consultation together that afternoon, and that the man had gathered from their talk as they left the house that Mr. Wyllard's illness was likely to end fatally, sooner than Sir William had at first supposed.

"Give me my sleeping draught, and then go, Dora," said Wyllard, when he and his wife were alone.

She prepared to obey him. The nurse was taking her rest at this hour, and it was the wife's privilege to attend upon her husband. The morphia sleeping draughts had been administered with rigid care, Dora herself watching the allotment of every bottle, lest the unhappy sufferer should be tempted to take an overdose and end

the tragedy of pain. Once, when she had betrayed her anxiety by a word spoken unawares, she had seen a curious smile upon her husband's pale lips, a smile that he had read her thought; and now she felt the peril of suicide was a much nearer fear. What had he to live for now—he who stood confessed a murderer and a hypocrite, before the wife who had revered him?

The sleeping draughts had been sent in from the local doctor, half a dozen at a time, Mr. Wyllard taking two and sometimes three in the course of the day and night. Dora kept them under lock and key in the cabinet where she kept her drawing materials, an old tulip-wood cabinet of Dutch inlaid work that stood in a corner of the room, at some distance from the sick man's sofa.

On the table by his side stood his dressing-case, with its glittering array of gold topped bottles—eau-de-cologne, toilet vinegar, sal volatile. His medicine glass was on the same table.

And now, while Dora stood with her face toward the cabinet, Wyllard's crippled hands were busied with one of those bottles in the dressing-case. With a wonderful swiftness and dexterity, taking into account the condition of his hands, he drew out one of the smallest bottles in the dressing-case, and unscrewed the stopper. The bottle contained about half an ounce of a clear white liquid.

Wyllard poured this liquid into a glass, which he held ready for Dora when, she brought him the sleeping draught. The colorless liquid would have hardly showed in the bottom of the glass under any circumstances, but Wyllard was careful to screen it with his hand.

Dora poured out the sleeping draught, and handed him the glass in saddest silence. What could she say to him from whose familiar face the mask had fallen. The husband she had loved and honored was lost to her forever. The helpless wretch lying there was a stranger to her; a sinner so begrimed with sin that only the infinite compassion of woman could behold him without loathing.

"I drink this to your future happiness, Dora," he said, solemnly, "and remember that at my last hour I blessed you for your goodness to a great sinner."

There was that in his tone which warned her of his purpose. She flung out her arms, trying to seize the hand that held the glass, before he could drink. But the table was between them, and the glass was at his lips when he finished speaking. He drank to the last drop—gave one long sigh and fell back upon his pillow—dead.

"Hydrocyan acid," said the local practitioner when he came to look at the corpse, "and a happy release into the bargain. I should liked to have given him an overdose of morphia myself, if the law of the land would have allowed me; or to have operated on the base of his brain and killed him tenderly in the interests of science, just to find out whether Cruveilhier or Virchow was right in his theorizing as to the seat of the malady. I go for Virchow, backed by Gull.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SWEET AS DEATH FOR EVERMORE."

DISMAL hours, dreary days of monotonous melancholy, a hopeless lassitude of mind and body, followed for Julian Wyllard's widow after that awful sudden death. Every one was very kind; every one was considerate; even the law was more than usually indulgent. The horror of an inquest was spared to that desolate mourner. Things were made very easy by Sir William Spencer's recent visit, by the fact that he had been heard by the servants to pronounce Mr. Wyllard's condition hopeless. Mr. Nicholls, the local practitioner, registered the cause of death as muscular atrophy, and considered himself justified in so doing, as to his mind suicide had been only a symptom of the malady, a paroxysm of despair following quickly upon Sir William Spencer's admission that the end was inevitable.

"If ever a man had a right to take his own life, that man had," said Mr. Nicholls, when he argued the matter with his own conscience.

An inquest would have done good to nobody; but Mr. Nicholls was very anxious for a post-mortem. He wanted to see if the muscles were much wasted, if the medulla itself showed traces of disease—whether Cruveilhier or Virchow had the best of the argument. But he was not allowed this privilege.

Those early stages of bereavement, while the house was darkened—that sunless autumn day on which the funeral train wound slowly over the moor to the distant burial-ground, the reading of the will, the coming and going of friends and legal advisers, were as an evil dream to Dora Wyllard. She took no part in anything. She affected no interest in anything. Just at the last she was asked if she would not like to lay her offering upon the coffin—one of those costly wreaths, those snow-white crosses of fairest exotics, which had been sent in profusion to the wealthy dead—and she had shrunk from the questioner with a shudder.

"Flowers upon *that* coffin? No, no, no!"

Yet at the last moment, when the dismal procession was leaving the hall, she appeared suddenly in the midst of the mourners, pale as the dead, and broke through the crowd, and placed her tribute on the coffin-lid, a handful of wild violets, gathered with her own hands in the melancholy autumn shrubberies. She bent down and laid her face upon the coffin. "I loved you once!" she moaned, "I loved you once!" And then kind hands drew her away, half-fainting, and led her back to her room.

The blow had quite unsettled poor Mrs. Wyllard's mind, people said afterward, recounting this episode, at second, third, or fourth hand. No one was surprised when she left Penmorval within a week of the funeral, and went on the Continent with her two old servants, Priscilla and Stodden.

Heathcote and Bothwell had planned everything for her, both be-

ing agreed that she must be taken away from the scene of her sorrow as speedily as the thing could be done: and she had obeyed them implicitly, unquestioningly, like a little child.

What could it matter where she went, or what became of her? That was the thought in her own mind when she assented so meekly to every arrangement that was being made for her welfare. What grief that ever widowed heart had to bear could be equal to her agony? It was not the loss of a husband she had adored—that loss for this life which might have been balanced by gain in a better life. It was the extinction of a beloved image forever. It was the knowledge that this man, to whom she had given the worship of her warm young heart, the enthusiastic regard of inexperienced girlhood, had never been worthy of her love: that he had come to her weary from the disappointment of a more passionate love than he could ever again offer to woman—the first deep love of a strong nature—a love that burns itself into heart and mind as aquafortis into steel. He had come to her stained with blood-guiltiness—an unconfessed assassin—holding his head high among his fellow-men, playing the good citizen, the generous landlord, the patron, the benefactor—he who had slain the widow's only son. He had lived a double life, hiding his pleasures, lest his gains should be lessened by men's knowledge of his lighter hours. He who had seemed to her the very spirit of truth and honor, had been steeped to the lips in falsehood—a creature of masks and semblances. This it was which bowed her to the dust; this it was which weighed upon her spirits as no common loss could have done.

With her own hands she explored her husband's desk and dispatch-boxes—the receptacles for all his more important papers—in search of any written confession which should attest the dead man's guilt, and forever establish Bothwell's innocence. It would have been unutterable agony to her to have made such a confession public—to have let the curious eyes of the world peer in upon that story of guilt and shame; yet had any such document existed, she would have deemed it her duty to make it public—her duty to her kinsman, who had been made the scapegoat of another man's crimes. Happily for her peace there was no such paper to be found—not a line, not a word which hinted at the dead man's secret; and happily for Bothwell the cloud that had hung over him had by this time dispersed. The steadiness with which he had held his ground in the neighborhood, the fact of his engagement to Miss Heathcote, had weighed with his Bodmin traducers; and those who had been the first to hint their suspicions were now the readiest to protest against the infamy of such an idea. Had Bothwell emigrated immediately after the inquest at the Vital Spark, these same people would have gone down to the grave convinced that he was the murderer.

But before the end of that year there occurred an event which was considered an all-sufficient proof of Bothwell's innocence and an easy solution of the mystery of the unknown girl's death. A miner entered a solitary farmhouse between Bodmin and Lostwithiel, in the dim gray of a winter evening, and killed two harmless womenfolk—an old woman and a young one—for the sake of a very small booty. He was caught red-handed, tried, convicted, and hanged

in Bodmin Jail; but although he confessed nothing, and died a hardened impenitent miner, it was believed by every one in the place that his was the pitiless hand which had sent the French girl to her doom.

"She had a little bit o' money about her, maybe, poor lass, and he took it from her, and when she screamed he pushed her out of the train. Such a man would think no more of doing it than of wringing the neck of a chicken," said an honest townsman of Bodmin.

Thus having identified somebody as the murderer, Bodmin was content; and Bothwell Grahame was more popular than he had ever been in the neighborhood. He gave the county town but little of his society, notwithstanding this restoration to local favor. He rarely played billiards at the inn, or loitered to gossip in the High Street. He could not forget that people had once looked coldly upon him, that he had suffered the shame of unjust suspicion. At Trevenna he was happy, for there no one had ever so wronged him; there he was a favorite with everybody, from the rector to the humblest fisherman. At Trevalga, too, and at Boscastle he had friends. He could afford to turn his back upon the people who had been so ready to think evil of him.

One of Heathcote's first cares after the Penmorval funeral had been to write to the Baronne de Maucroix. His letter was to the following effect.

"It is my grave duty to inform you, madame, that the murderer of your son has confessed his crime, and also that he has escaped from all earthly tribunals to answer for his sins before the Judge of all men. A painful malady, from which he had been for some time a sufferer, ended fatally on the evening of the 19th inst., within the hour in which he confessed his guilt. His case has been pronounced hopeless by a distinguished physician; but it is just possible the shock caused by the unexpected revelation of his crime may have hastened his end.

"Accept, madame, my respectful homage, and permit me also to express my admiration of that truly Christian spirit which you evinced at our late interview. EDWARD HEATHCOTE."

By return of post Heathcote received an answer to his letter; but the answer was not in the handwriting of the Baronne de Maucroix. That hand was at rest forever. The letter was from the baronne's friend and confessor, the curé of the village adjacent to her château.

"MONSIEUR,—Under the sad circumstances prevailing at the château, I have taken it upon myself, with the permission of the late baronne's legal representative, to reply to your polite communication, which was never seen by the eyes of my lamented friend and benefactress, Madame de Maucroix. Upon that very evening which you name in your letter as the date of the murderer's death, I called at the château, soon after vespers, according to my daily custom; being permitted at that period of the day's decline to enjoy an hour's quiet conversation with that saintly woman who has now

been taken from us. I was ushered, as usual, into the *salon*, where I quietly awaited Madame de Maucroix's appearance, having been told that she was in her son's room, that apartment which she used as her oratory.

"I knew that it was her custom to spend hours in that chamber of her beloved dead, absorbed in spiritual meditations; so I waited with patience and without surprise, for more than an hour, musing by the fire. Then, wondering at this unusual forgetfulness in one always so considerate, I ventured to lift the *portière*, and to pass through the intervening *salon*, which was in darkness, to the bed-chamber, where, through the half-open door, I saw a lamp burning.

I pushed the door a little further open, and went in. The baronne was on her knees beside the bed, her clasped hands stretched out straight before her upon the satin coverlet, her face leaning forward. I should have withdrawn in respectful silence, but there was something stark and rigid in the dear lady's attitude which filled me with fear. I wondered that she had not been disturbed by the sound of my footsteps, for my heavy shoes had creaked as I walked across the floor. I drew nearer to her. Not a breath, not a movement.

"I bent over her and touched the clasped hands. They were still forever in death. It was a peaceful, a blessed ending: such an end as they who best loved that noble creature would have chosen for her.

"Accept, monsieur, the assurance of my high consideration.

"PIERRE DUPLESSI."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"WHO KNOWS NOT CIRCLE?"

THE Cornish tors, those wild brown hills upon whose dark foreheads time writes no wrinkles, were just one rear older since Julian Wyllard's death, and Bothwell Grahame was established in his house at Trevenna as an instructor of the embryo Engineer. Already two lads had gone forth from Bothwell's house, after six months' training, and had done well at Woolwich. Other lads were coming to him—sons of men he had known in Bengal. He was on the high road to reputation.

After that first passionate disgust with all things, during which he had stopped the builders and prepared to quash that contract which he had signed with such delight, there had come a more tranquil spirit; and Bothwell Grahame had faced his last unexpected trouble with a resolute mind.

A conversation which he had with Edward Heathcote soon after Julian Wyllard's death, had given him his first gleam of life. Heathcote spoke to him hopefully of the future, and urged him to wait quietly.

"Your marriage will be so much the wiser, so much the more likely to result in lasting happiness, for this delay," he said. "If you are as loyal and stanch as I believe you to be: if it is really my sister you would like to marry, and not this fascinating widow, who wooes you with fortune in one hand and social status in the other; if you are really bent upon sacrificing these good things for Hilda's

sake, be sure she will ultimately accept your sacrifice. In the meantime be patient, and pursue your independent course. A woman always respects a man who can live without her."

"But I can not," answered Bothwell. "Life will be less than life to me till Hilda and I are one."

"Don't let her know that, if you mean to be master of your fate in the future," said Heathcote. "Time can be the only test of your truth. If when a year is passed you have not married Lady Valeria Harborough, the chances are that my sister will begin to have faith in you. I know that she loves you."

"Tell me where she is, that I may go to her—that I may convince her."

"I have promised to respect her secret," answered Heathcote firmly.

Bothwell accepted this friendly counsel with a good grace, went back to his old lodgings at Trevenna, set the builders at work again, spent his days in the open air and his nights in hard study, ate little, slept less, and looked like the ghost of his former self.

He saw no more of Lady Valeria; but a society paper informed him early in November that she had taken a villa at Monaco. He could guess from what fount of consolation she was obtaining oblivion of her griefs. Her grace, her charm of manner, were dwelt upon fondly by the paragraphist. She was leading a life of absolute seclusion on account of her recent bereavement; but she was the admired and observed of all wherever she appeared.

The succeeding paragraph told of Sir George Mildmay's residence at one of the chief hotels. He was a distinguished figure at the tables, had broken the bank on more than one occasion.

Bothwell smiled a cynical smile at the juxtaposition of those two names.

"I suppose the gentleman has forgotten his beating," he said to himself.

It was an infinite relief to him to know that Lady Valeria was on the other side of the Channel, that her pale face could not rise before him ghost-like amidst the home which she had ruined. He worked on with all the better will at that embryo home of his for the knowledge that this dreaded siren was far away—worked with such energy that the builders were whipped out of their customary jog-trot, and laid bricks as bricks were never laid before. Bothwell watched every brick, with a three-foot rule in his hand, and pointed out every flaw in the setting. He paid his builder promptly, as the work progressed, and gave him every encouragement to be speedy.

The alterations and improvements in the old cottage were all completed by the end of November, and the builders had finished the brick-work of the new rooms. The old rooms were thoroughly dry and ready for occupation before Christmas; and Bothwell spent his Christmas in his own house, the first Christmas he had so spent, and a very dismal one. But he had his dog, a devoted collie, the gift of Dora Wyllard; he had his pipe and his books; and he made the best of his solitude. He had a couple of lads—his first pupils—coming to him early in January, and he wanted to air the house in his own person. He was a little proud of this first house of his own, even in the midst of his sadness, as every man is proud of the thing

that he has created. He walked about the rooms, opening and shutting doors and window-sashes, to see how they worked. Needless to say that some of them did not work at all, and that he had various interviews with foremen and carpenters, by whom a good deal of tinkering had to be done before everything was ship-shape. That was Bothwell's favorite expression. He wanted things ship-shape. "He ought to call his house Ship-shape Hall," said the foreman.

Bothwell's chief delight was derived from his own little inventions and contrivances, his shelves in odd corners, his pegs and hooks, and ingenious little cupboards. These he gazed upon and examined daily in silent rapture. When his two boys came to him—long-legged brawny youths, with open countenances, grinning perpetually for very shyness—he took them to see all the shelves and hooks, and expounded his theories in relation to those conveniences.

There was not to be a slovenly corner in the house; every article was to have its peg or hook, or shelf or cupboard. Tennis-balls, rackets, foils, single-sticks, skates, whips, guns, boots, caps, and gloves. Everything was to be classified, departmented. Organization was to be the leading note.

Before a week was over, the boys had begun to adore Bothwell. They were sporting, and could afford to keep horses; and Bothwell and they hunted with fox-hounds and harriers all through that long winter, far into the gladness of spring. The boys were always with their tutor. He had no leisure in which to abandon himself to sadness; except when he shut himself up in his study to write to his Cousin Dora, who was living in Florence, attended by the faithful Priscilla, who hated Italy as the stronghold of the Scarlet Lady, and by Stodden, the old Penmorval butler. Julian Wyllard's widow was living in absolute retirement, broken-hearted, seeing no one, seen by no one. The society papers had nothing to say about *her*.

From Bothwell, Heathcote sometimes heard of her, heard of her with an aching heart. No message of friendship, no line of recognition had there ever been for him in any of those letters to Bothwell, of which he was generally told, some of which had been read to him.

Hilda had been quietly pursuing her studies at the Conservatoire all this time, seeing a good deal of Parisian life in a very modest way—that inner life of struggling artists and men of letters, and their homely industrious families, a life in which she found much that was intellectual, blended with a pleasant simplicity, an absence of all pretense. She liked the Tillet girls, and she liked her surroundings; while music, which had always been a passion with her, now became the sole object of her existence.

"I suppose you will come back to the Spaniards some day, and take care of the twins and me," her brother said to her when they met for an hour in the August after Wyllard's death.

He had stopped in Paris to see Hilda, on his way to Switzerland.

"Yes, I shall go back to the old home—when Bothwell is married."

"That is rather hard lines for me, seeing that I don't believe Bothwell has any idea of getting married to any one except you."

Hilda blushed, and then shook her head despondingly.

"Who can tell what he means to do?" she said. "General Harborough died less than a year ago. Lady Valeria could scarcely marry within the year."

"But if Bothwell meant to marry Lady Valeria, he would scarcely be grinding lads at Travenna," answered Heathcote. "He has behaved so well that I feel it my duty to plead for him."

Hilda put her arms round her brother's neck and kissed him, by way of answer.

"Let me finish my studies at the Conservatoire; and then, at the beginning of next winter, I will go back to the Spaniards, if you still want me there. But perhaps you will have found another mistress for the old house before that time."

"I know what you mean, Hilda," he answered gravely. "No, there is no hope of that."

"Not yet, perhaps. It is too soon. Dora is too loyal and true to forget easily. But the day will come when her heart will turn to her first love. You have never ceased to care for her, have you, Edward?"

"No, dear; such a love as mine means once, and once only. My wife was all goodness, and I was grateful to her, and fond of her—but that affection was not like the old love, and it never extinguished the old love."

"Be sure your reward will come in due time."

"I can afford to wait."

He went on to Switzerland, and from Switzerland strayed into Italy, the St. Gotha route inviting him. He spent a month at Florence, and he saw Dora Wyllard several times during that period, for half an hour at a time. She had taken up her abode for the summer at an hotel—near the Abbey of the Gray Monks, in the forest of Vallombrosa, a truly romantic spot amidst wooded hills. Hither Edward Heathcote made his pilgrimage, deeming himself richly rewarded by half an hour's interview; but there was little in those interviews to stimulate hope. The widow was bowed down by the burden of her sorrow. Her only feeling in relation to Edward Heathcote was that he alone upon earth knew the story of her husband's life, and that he alone could fully sympathize with her in her hopeless misery.

There are widows and widows. While Dora Wyllard was living alone among the pines and chestnuts of the Apennines, seeing no one but monks and occasional tourists, and religiously avoiding the latter, Lady Valeria Harborough was living up the Thames, in a neighborhood which has of late become so fashionable that it now ranks rather as an annex to West-End-London than as the country.

General Harborough's widow had hired one of the prettiest villas at Marlow, a dainty bungalow, built by an artist, who soon tired of his toy, and exchanged the villa for a house-boat, which was less commodious and a good deal more unhealthy, but which possessed the charm of not being rooted in the soil. The house had seemed perfect when Lady Valeria took it, but she had sent down a West-End upholsterer with a keen eye for the beautiful to make all possible improvements; and the result was a nest which might have satisfied a modern Cleopatra. But it did not quite satisfy Lady

Valeria, who found fault with a good many things, and informed the upholsterer that although his taste was fairly good, and his coloring well chosen, there was an absence of originality in his work.

"I have seen other houses almost as pretty," she said, "and I have seen drawing-rooms just like this, which is worse. I hate to live in rooms like other people's."

The upholsterer murmured something about a royal princess and a royal duchess, both of whom had condescended to express themselves pleased at his decoration of their houses; but Lady Valeria froze him with her look of scorn.

"I hope you don't compare me with royal princesses," she said contemptuously. "They are accustomed to let other people think for them, poor creatures, and they take anything they can get. No one expects originality in a palace. I don't wish to grumble, Mr. Sherrendale, but I am just a little disappointed in your work. It has no *cachet*."

The upholsterer accepted his rebuke meekly, but with an air of being wounded to the quick; and he took care to debit his wounded feelings against Lady Valeria when he made out his bill.

That villa up the river in the lovely June and July weather seemed to be in the midst of the world's fair. It was gayer than Park Lane—a more concentrated gayety. Pleasure wore her zone a little looser here than in London. There was just a touch of Bohemianism. People dressed as they liked, said what they liked, did as they liked. There were few stately entertainments, few formal dinners, or smart dances; but every one kept open house; there was a perpetual dropping in, or going and coming, which kept carriages and horses at work all day between houses and stations. The river was like a high-road, and half the population lived in white flannel, and smart tennis frocks, and eccentric hats. It was a world apart—a bright, glad summer world in which there was no such thing as thought or care; a world of shining blue water and green meadows, dipping willows, rushy eyots, and hanging woods; a world in which there were hardly any regular meals, only a perpetual picnic, the popping of champagne corks heard in every creek and backwater, while humbler revelers rested on their oars to drink deep of shandy-gaff; a world musical every evening with glees, and songs, and serenades, to an accompaniment of feathering oars.

In such a world as this Lady Valeria Harborough lived over again the same kind of life she had lived at Simla—but not quite the same; for at Simla she had maintained her dignity as General Harborough's wife; she had received the worship of her admirers as a queen in the old days of chivalry might receive the homage of true knights. Now she had a different air; and the homage that was offered was of a different quality. That winter of widowhood at Monaco, with her stanch ally Sir George Mildmay in constant attendance upon her, had made a curious change in Lady Valeria. It had vulgarized her with that gratuitous vulgarity which has become of late years one of the leading notes in English society—the affectation of clipped words and slang phrases, the choice of vulgar ideas, the studious cultivation of vulgar manners. Naturally this acquired vulgarity of Maytair is not quite the same as that of Brix-

ton or Highbury. There is not the genuine ring about it. The accent is the accent of Patricia, but the words are the words of Plebeia. It is, however, all the more offensive because of that blending of aristocratic insolence—that Pall Mall swagger which gives *ton* to the idioms of Hoxton and Holloway.

Lady Valeria had fallen into the fashionable slang and the current drivel. She had left off reading, and had taken to cigarettes. Her court was less of a court than of old, and more of a smoke-room. People came and went, and did and said what they liked in her presence. Sometimes in the dreamy noontide, when the closed venetians and the shadowy rooms recalled the atmosphere of Simla, Lady Valeria reclined in her lounging chair, fanning herself languidly, and half stupefied with chloral, a state which she described as being "a little low." Sometimes in the evening she was all fire and sparkle, a vivacity which her enemies attributed to dry champagne. There was a great deal of champagne consumed at that ideal villa, but with a perpetual dropping in of visitors—a household conducted upon the laxest principles—who could tell what became of the wine? The empty bottles were the only difficulty, since there seems to be no use yet invented for empty champagne bottles; the very outcasts, the rag and bone collectors, reject them.

Lady Valeria was going to the bad. That was the general opinion among her nearest and dearest—the people who ate her dinners and drank her wine, and smoked her cigarettes, and used her luxurious rooms as if the villa had been a club. She had taken a horror of solitude, must have a crowd about her always, be amused, cost what it might; and as she hated her own family she would have none of them at any price. Hence the somewhat rowdy following which made the house by the river notorious; known by those lighted windows which shone late into the small hours, when all other casements were dark; known by the sound of strident laughter and the rattle of dice.

Lady Valeria had been ruined by a winter at Monaco. That was what some people said. Others ascribed her deterioration to the fact of having escaped all control, and having too much money at her disposal. Others shook their heads, and asked what could be expected of any woman whose guide, philosopher, and friend was George Mildmay.

"And he means to be her husband," added one shrewd observer.

"My dear Aubrey, she detests him," urged another.

"That makes no difference. He means to marry her. A woman who takes chloral will marry any man who makes up his mind to have her."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"HOW LIKE A WINTER HATH THY ABSENCE BEEN."

PERHAPS, among all Valeria's friends and admirers, Sir George Mildmay was the only man who had any inkling of the truth, who was keen enough to discover the real cause of that moral decay which in its results was obvious to every one. He had enjoyed more of Lady Valeria's confidence than anybody else, and he had

watched her closely, both before and after her husband's death. She had tried to keep him at a distance when they first met at Monaco; she had let him see that her resentment was as strong as ever; but at a race-meeting in the neighborhood he had contrived to make his peace with her. The gambler's common instinct drew them together. She was alone in a strange land—or in other words, she knew no one except Sir George Mildmay whose counsel upon turf questions was worth sixpence; and she humiliated herself, and forgot that burning wrong of the past, tried to forget that for her sake her dead husband had beaten this man. She allowed Sir George to call upon her one February afternoon, and tell her all about his book for the Craven and the First Spring, across the dainty Moorish tea-tray, with its little brazen tea-pot, and egg-shell cups and saucers. After that they became stanch allies, if not stanch friends. Valeria had now the command of ample funds, and could bet as much as she liked. When she took Sir George's advice she was generally a winner. She invariably lost when she followed her own inclinations. He initiated her as to the mysteries of the tables at Monte Carlo, expounded the whole theory of martingales, and showed her how she might beguile the tedium of her days with the occult science of chance, as exemplified by pricking rows of figures on a card.

They were a great deal together as the season wore on, and, as a natural consequence, they were talked about a great deal by that section of society whose chief conversation is of the follies and sins of its own particular set.

Sir George felt that he was getting on; but in his heart of hearts he knew perfectly well that Valeria did not care a straw for him, and that she was never likely to care for him. He knew that she had passionately loved Bothwell Grahame, and that despair at his abandonment was the mainspring of all her conduct. She was reckless of herself and of her good name—spent her money like water—ruined her health—indulged every caprice of the moment—gave way to every fit of ill-temper—simply because, having lost Bothwell Grahame, she had nothing in life worth living for, except such things as could give her feverish excitement, and with that excitement forgetfulness.

Knowing all this, knowing that the woman's heart was like an empty sepulcher, George Mildmay was not the less determined to win her for his wife.

"We suit each other so well," he said modestly, when his friends congratulated him, considerably in advance, after their manner. "No, we are not engaged. I only wish we were; but I dare say, if I am good, it may run to that by and by. She is a very fine woman, and has a remarkable head for the turf—remarkable, by Jove! She's always wrong; but the mind is there, don't you know, a very remarkable mind. And she's a very fair judge of a horse, too, or would be if she would only look at his legs, which she never does."

"And she has plenty of lucre, eh, George? I think that's the main point in your case, isn't it?"

"Very sorry for myself, but can't do without the filthy lucre. Couldn't afford to elope with Mrs. Menelaus, if she was a pauper," answered Sir George, with cheery frankness.

"Some idiot told me that her husband knocked you down at the last party they ever gave at Fox Hill," said his friend, with a half grin; "that was a lie, of course."

"No, there is some truth—we had a little passage at fisticuffs: and that's why I mean to marry his widow," answered Sir George savagely. "I meant to have the law of him; but as he bilked the beak by dying before the hearing of the summons, I mean to have his money by way of consolation. It will be a pleasanter remedy."

"And the lady thrown in by way of makeweight," grinned his friend.

The time came when Sir George thought he might venture to advance his claim, in a purely business-like manner. Lady Valeria and he had made a splendid book for the Derby, and the lady had won something over five thousand pounds, graphically described by her coadjutor as a pot of money. The money was of very little consequence to her nowadays, for she had not yet succeeded in living beyond her income; but she was as eager to win as she had been in the old time at Simla when losing meant difficulty, and might mean ruin. She loved the sensation of success, the knowledge that her horse had struggled to the front and kept there at the crucial moment.

Emboldened by this brilliant *coup*, Sir George reminded Valeria of his patience and devotion, and asked her to accept him as her second husband.

"I don't expect you to marry me just yet," he said. "It's only six months since the general died—and I know women are sticklers for etiquette in these matters, though they are leaving off widows' caps, and a good deal of humbug. But I should like to have your word for the future. I don't want another fellow to cut in and win the cup after I've made all the running."

Lady Valeria looked at him in a leisurely way with that contemptuous smile of hers, a smile that had crushed so many a gallant admirer.

"I thought we understood each other too well for this kind of thing to happen," she said, with perfect good temper and placidity. "We have been getting on remarkably well together—and I have even taught myself to forget your impertinence that night at Fox Hill. As to marriage, you may be almost sure of one thing, and quite sure of another—first, that I shall never marry at all; secondly, that I shall never marry you."

Sir George bowed, and said not another word. The partnership on the turf and at baccarat was too profitable to be imperiled. But he weant the alliance to become closer and more binding, before he and Lady Valeria had done with each other.

And now in this lovely July weather, when the river and the woods were at their fairest, Sir George Mildmay felt himself several furlongs nearer the winning-post than he had been at Monaco. Lady Valeria had become a more sensitive creature of late. The strings of the lyre were played upon more easily. In other words, Valeria had taken to chloral. Sir George was on excellent terms with her maid, and had received information of a character which he himself called "the straight tip" from that astute damsel. Lady Valeria had her good days and her bad days; and on the bad days she

was sunk in an abyss of despair, from which not even some great success in her racing speculations could rouse her. It was in one of these fits of despondency that Sir George Mildmay made his second proposal of marriage. But this time he did not sue as her slave, nor did he adopt the calm and *débonnaire* tone of a business man advocating an advantageous alliance. He approached her with a brutal energy, a coarse plainness of speech, which shocked the shattered nerves, and frightened her into submission.

He told her the scandals that were rife about her—told her how, if she did not rehabilitate her character by becoming his wife, she would find herself cut by society as his mistress—laughed at her half-indignant, half-hysterical protest—told her that the world was much too wicked to believe in any innocent alliance between a beautiful woman and a man of forty, whose past life had not been stainless; talked to her as no man had ever dared to talk to her until that hour—talked till she sat trembling before him, vanquished, subjugated by the strangeness of sheer brutality, she who a year ago had been sheltered and defended from slander and insult by the protecting love of a noble heart.

She sat cowering before him. Was the world so vile as to suspect her—and of caring for this man, whom she loathed? She covered her face with her hands and sobbed aloud.

"There is no one upon earth who would stir a foot to protect me against their vile slanders; not one of my own kin who would stand up for me," she sobbed.

"How could you expect it," asked Sir George, "when you have kept all your people at arm's length? You may lay long odds not one of *that* lot will take your part. I would give some of your traducers a sound horsewhipping to-morrow, but that would do you more harm than good, unless you mean to marry me."

"Horsewhip them, and I *will* marry you," cried Valeria, rising and rushing from the room, tremulous with rage.

Upon this hint Sir George promptly acted. He took an early opportunity of leading on a harmless youth to say something uncivil of Lady Valeria, and thereupon chastised him in his flannels before a select audience. The scape-goat writhed under the strong gut riding-whip, could not understand why he was so castigated, vowed vengeance, and sent a friend to Sir George that evening, proposing an early meeting on the sands near Ostrand; at which message Sir George openly laughed.

"When boys are rude they must be punished," he said, "but I don't shoot boys. Tell your young friend I am sorry I lost my temper; and that if he will write a nice little letter, apologizing to my future wife for his rashness of speech, I shall consider we are quits."

It was known the next day along both banks of the river that Lady Valeria was to marry Sir George Mildmay immediately on the expiry of her mourning. The "Daily Telegraph" possessed itself of the fact before the "Morning Post," and it was recorded in all the society papers of the following week. Bothwell Grahame read of it a week later in the "United Service Gazette," read and was thankful; for now this restless spirit, which had wrought him so much evil, would be exorcised and bound forever in the thrall of matrimony.

"I am sorry she is to marry a scoundrel," he said to himself; "otherwise my feeling would be unalloyed gladness."

And now Bothwell dared to hope that the wandering bird Hilda might be lured home to her nest—now that doubting heart might have faith once more.

If he could but write to her, tell her of Valeria's engagement, ask her if he had not proved himself faithful, if she could not trust him henceforward with perfect trustfulness! She had believed in him when his fellow-men pointed at him as a suspected murderer; she had fled from him because an audacious woman claimed him for her lover. Strange inconsistency of a woman's heart, so strong and yet so weak!

Heathcote was in Italy, and Heathcote was the only channel of communication between Bothwell and his lost love. He saddled Glencoe and rode over to the Spaniards, where he hoped to hear of Heathcote's speedy return; but the fräulein was quite in the dark as to her employer's movements. He wrote very seldom; he left everything in her hands. She had received a little note from Florence nearly a fortnight ago. He had written not one word as to the probable time of his return.

Bothwell talked about Hilda, and insidiously questioned the fräulein, who might perchance know the girl's whereabouts. But Miss Meyerstein was quite as dark upon the subject as Greek society in general was about the adventures of Ariadne. All Miss Meyerstein could tell Bothwell was that Hilda had Glossop with her, which preference of Glossop the mild fräulein evidently regarded as something in the way of a slight to herself.

"If Glossop can be trusted to know where Hilda is, I think I might have been trusted," she said.

"I wonder a frivolous person like Glossop has not told the secret to half Bodmin before now," said Bothwell.

He wrote to Hilda that night, inclosing his letter to Heathcote at Florence. It seemed a wearily roundabout way of reaching Hilda, who might be in Scotland or in Scandinavia for all he knew; but it was his only way, and it was just possible that she might be with her brother, and receive his letter sooner than he dared hope. He wrote a few lines to Heathcote with the inclosure, telling him about Lady Valeria's engagement. "I suppose when they two are married our bans may be put up in Bodmin Church," he wrote; "unless Hilda has any objection to me."

He counted the days, the hours almost, while he waited for a reply to his letter. He followed the letter in its journey, now over sea, and then over land—halted with it at Calais, went southward with it, skirted the Mediterranean, pierced the Alps, and then it was all darkness. Who could tell where the letter might have to go before it reached Florence?

"She may be hiding herself somewhere in England, and that wretched letter may have to travel all the way back again," he told himself ruefully.

He waited, and waited, and waited; bearing himself with a brave front before his pupils all the while, teaching them botanizing with them, boating, riding, shooting with them, and never once losing temper with them on account of his own trouble. But he was

suffering an agony of impatience snd suspense all the same, and one of the more thoughtful of his lads saw that he was paler than usual, and worn and haggard.

"You mustn't work with us if you are ill, Mr. Grahame," said the boy; we'll get on with our work by ourselves for a bit."

"No, my dear boy, I'm not ill; I have not been sleeping very well lately—that's all. 'Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care.'"

"Yes, we can't get on without that beggar," answered the boy. "I know what it is to be awake all night with the toothache. I've often wondered that the nights should be so jolly short when one's asleep, and so jolly long when one's awake."

At breakfast a few days later one of the lads, the son of a brother officer of Bothwell's, looked up from the "Evening Standard" with an exclamation of surprise.

"Here's the widow of one of your old friends gone and got married, Mr. Grahame," he said. "'At Galbraith Church, N. B., Sir George Mildmay, Bart., of the Hop Poles, Maidstone, to Lady Valeria Harborough, of Galbraith Castle, Perthshire, and Fox Hill, Plymouth.' You saved the old general's life up at the hills, didn't you?" asked the boy. "I've heard my father talk about it."

"It wasn't worth talking about, Hector," answered Bothwell. "The general was a good friend to me, and I honor his memory."

"More than Lady Valeria does, or she wouldn't marry such a cad as Mildmay. I've heard my father say he is a cad."

"It is safer not to repeat opinions of that kind," said Bothwell.

He tried to play the school-master while his heart was beating furiously for very joy. She was married, that viper who had so well-nigh spoiled his life, she was married to a scoundrel who would make her life miserable, and he, Bothwell, was his own man again. Hilda could have no further justification for distrust. He had held himself aloof from the siren, he had demonstrated by his conduct that he had no hankering after her or her fortune; and now that she was safely disposed of in second wedlock, Hilda could have no excuse for delaying his happiness.

All things had gone well with him, except this one thing. He had built and furnished his house, and laid out his garden; people were full of praises for his taste and cleverness. He has been lucky with his pupils, and he liked his work. He was able to save money, and before the year was out he had laid aside the first hundred pounds toward the extinction of his debt to his cousin. But Dora did not want the debt extinguished, and had written him an indignant letter when he offered to pay the money into her banking account.

"How dare you pinch and scrape in order to pay me off?" she wrote. "How do I know that you are not half-starving those poor lads, in your desire to get out of my debt? It is your paltry pride which rebels at an obligation even to your adopted sister."

To atone for the harshness of her letter she sent him an old Florentine cabinet of ebony and ivory, a gem which glorified his drawing-room, already enriched by her gifts; for she had sent him bronzes from one place, and pottery from another, and glass from a third. She had made up her mind that when the time came for Bothwell

to lead his young wife home, the home should be in somewise worthy of the wife.

And now there was an end of all uncertainties about the first unhappy entanglement of Bothwell's; and nothing but caprice need keep him and Hilda apart any longer.

A fortnight had gone since he had written to Hilda, and there had been no sign. It was the fifth day after the announcement of Lady Valeria's marriage in the London papers, and Bothwell started once more upon that long ride by moorland and lane, across country from Trevenna to Bodmin, and thence to the Spaniards. He expected the smallest comfort at the end of his journey; only a little talk with the fräulein, who might have had a recent letter from Heathcote, and might be able to tell him something, were it ever so little. She was always friendly and compassionate, and she was always ready to talk to him about Hilda, and that was much. On one occasion she had gone so far as to take him into Hilda's private sitting-room, and let him gloat over the rows of prettily-bound books —Tennyson and Browning, and Dickens and Thackeray—and the little tables, and manifold knickknacks, the mantel-piece border which those dear hands had worked. There stood his own photograph, framed and curtained with plush, as if it were too sacred for the common eye. He had given her a smaller copy of the same photograph, and he hoped that she had taken that with her, that she looked at it sometimes, among strange faces.

Miss Meyerstein expatiated on Hilda's abrupt departure, and the little luggage with which she had provided herself.

"Only her dressing-bag and a small portmanteau," said the fräulein. "She left all her pretty frocks hanging in the wardrobe, all her laces and ribbons, and gloves and ornaments in her drawers. She must have had to buy everything new. And there is her wedding-gown, just as it came from the dress-maker's the day after she left home."

And then, at Bothwell's urgent, reiterated entreaty, Miss Meyerstein went into the adjoining room, and came back, after a rattling of keys, bringing with her a white object which looked like the sheeted dead being carried away from a plague-stricken house.

It was only Hilda's wedding-gown, wrapped in voluminous coverings of white linen.

Miss Meyerstein flung off the coverings, and shook out the white satin gown, satin of so rich a fabric that it took all manner of pearly and opal hues in the autumn light—a smart little frock, with a round skirt, and just one big puff at the back of the waist, like a carelessly-tied sash.

"Short, for dancing," said Miss Meyerstein, as she held out the frock at arm's length, dangling in the air.

"But she didn't expect to dance upon her wedding-day!" ejaculated Bothwell stupidly.

"No, but afterward. She would go to dances, and she would be expected to appear as a bride."

"Of course," muttered Bothwell, wondering how many dances —save the dances of pixies in a moonlit glen—might be expected to occur within easy reach of Trevenna.

He knelt and kissed the hem of the white satin frock, and then turned away with a sigh that was almost a sob.

"Not a grain of dust has got to it," said Miss Meyerstein. "It will be ready when it is wanted."

"Yes," answered Bothwell. "The gown will be ready when it is wanted; but who can tell who the bridegroom will be?"

"He will be nobody if he is not you," said Miss Meyerstein. "That poor child positively adores you."

"How do you know? It is nearly a year since you saw her."

"Such love as that does not wear itself out in a year."

To-day Bothwell felt that he wanted even such poor comfort as might be had from feminine twaddle of this kind. He felt that even a romp with the twins would do him good. They were of her race, and she had loved them, and they could prattle to him about her.

It was a rainy afternoon late in October, a dreary day for that long ride over the hills. The Atlantic yonder had a look of unspeakable melancholy; a great gray sea into which gray earth and sky melted. It would be dark before Bothwell could get back to Trevenna, and the ride was not the pleasantest after nightfall: but a man who had ridden through Afghan passes in his time was not to be scared by dark hills and narrow lanes. Bothwell was in a mood to ride somewhere, were it only in the hope of riding away from his own impatient thoughts. He had delayed starting till after luncheon, having waited to give his boys the full benefit of a long morning's work. It was between five and six when he came to the iron gates of the Spaniards, and the sun was setting behind the hills yonder above Penmorval, poor deserted Penmorval, where the pictured faces looked out upon empty floors, and where the housekeeper sighed as she went from room to room, attending to fires that warmed desolate hearths.

The Spaniards looked a little more cheerful than when Bothwell had seen it last, for there were lights in many of the lower windows, and those lamp-lit casements glowed brightly across the rainy dusk. He would be able to to get a good cup of tea from the fräulein, and to put up his horse for an hour or two before he turned homeward again.

An empty carriage passed him in the drive, and turned toward an opening in the shrubbery that led to the stable-yard. There were visitors at the Spaniards upon that wet evening! Bothwell wondered who the guest, or guests, could be, in the absence of the master.

Or was it the master himself who had come back? His heart beat faster at the thought. He dismounted and rang the bell. The door was opened directly. There were a couple of servants in the hall and some luggage. Yes, the master of the house had returned.

"Take my horse to the stables, like a good fellow," said Bothwell to the man who had opened the door. "Your master has come home, I see."

"Yes, sir, ten minutes ago."

Bothwell waited to ask no further questions, did not wait to be announced even, but walked straight to the library, Heathcote's usual sitting-room, opened the door, and went in.

There was no lamp. The room was lighted only by the fire-glow,

which gleamed on book-shelves and old oak paneling, and on the massive timbers of the ceiling. There was a tea-table in front of the wide old fireplace—one of those vagabond tea-tables which can make themselves at home anywhere—and the tea was being poured out by a girl who wore a neat little black velvet toque and dark cloth jacket, a girl who looked as if she had just come off a journey, while Heathcote reposed in his arm-chair on the other side of the hearth.

No one but Hilda could have been so much at her ease in that room, which was in some wise a sacred chamber, especially reserved for the master of the house. No one but Hilda had such pretty hair, or such a graceful bend of the head. The girl in the velvet toque was sitting with her back to Bothwell; but he had not a moment's doubt as to her identity.

He went over to the hearth, gave his hand to Heathcote silently, and then seated himself by Hilda's side, she looking up at him dumbly the while, half in fear.

"What have you to say to me, Hilda, after having used me so ill?" he asked, taking her hand in his.

"Only that it was for your own sake I went away on the eve of our marriage," she answered seriously. "I did not want to stand between you and happiness."

"Would it not have been wiser and fairer to me, if you had taken my views upon the matter before you ran away?"

"You would have been too generous to tell me the truth, you would have sacrificed yourself to your sense of honor. How could I tell you did not love Lady Valeria better than me?"

"If you had read 'Tom Jones' you would have had a very easy way of solving that question. You would have had only to look in the glass, and there you would have seen, as Sophia Western saw, the reason for a lover's devotion. You would have seen purity and innocence, and fresh young beauty; and you would have known that your lover could not falter in his truth to you."

"I don't think Tom's conduct was altogether blameless, in spite of the looking-glass, eh, Bothwell?" said Heathcote, laughing at him. It is so hard to have to make love before a third person. "You have to thank me for bringing home your sweetheart. I read the advertisement of Lady Valeria's marriage at Genoa three days ago, as I was on my way home; so I stopped in Paris, and brought this young lady away from her musical studies at an hour's notice. I suppose she was getting tired of the Conservatoire, for she seemed uncommonly glad to come."

"And you were in Paris?" cried Bothwell. "So near! If I had only known!"

"There would have been nothing gained by following her," said Heathcote. "I never met with a more resolute young woman than this sister of mine. When she was determined to have you, there was not the least use in opposing her, and when she had made up her mind not to have you, she was just as inflexible. But now that Lady Valeria has taken to herself a second husband and that you seem to bear the blow pretty cheerfully, perhaps Hilda may be inclined to change her mind for the second time."

"Her wedding-gown is hanging in her wardrobe ready for her,"

said Bothwell, drawing a little closer to his truant sweetheart, in the sheltering dusk, that delicious hour for true and loving hearts, blindman's holiday, betwixt dog and wolf.

"How did you know that?" asked Heathcote.

"The fräulein told me. She has been taking care of your wedding-gown, Hilda. She knew that it would be wanted. You had better wear it as soon as possible, dearest. It is a year old already; and it is going more and more out of fashion every day."

"She shall wear it before we are a month older," said Heathcote. "I have had too much trouble about this marriage already; and I'll stand no more shilly-shallying. We'll put up the bans next Sunday, and in less than a month from to-day you two foolish people shall be one."

Edward Heathcote kept his word, and the smart white satin frock was worn one bright morning in November, worn by the prettiest bride that had been seen in Bodmin Church for many a year, the townspeople said—those townspeople who had now only praises and friendliest greetings for Bothwell Grahame, albeit a year ago he had seemed to them as a possible murderer.

A telegram had informed Dora Wyllard of the wedding-day, so soon as ever the date had been fixed, but she had not responded, as Hilda and her brother had hoped she would respond, to the invitation to be present at the wedding. She could not bear to see the Cornish hills yet awhile, she told Hilda, in her letter of congratulation. Years must pass, in all probability, before she could endure to look upon that familiar landscape again, or to see that roof-tree which had sheltered her when she was Julian Wyllard's happy wife.

"I am rejoiced to know that you and Bothwell have come to a safe haven at last," she wrote. "I shall always be interested in hearing of your welfare, cheered and comforted by the thought of your bright home. I can not blame you for having made Bothwell wait for his happiness, Hilda; for I feel that you have acted wisely in making sure of his free choice. There can now be no afterthought, no lurking suspicion to come between you and your wedded love.

"For my own part I am at peace here, and that is much. I read a great deal, paint a little every day; and my picture, however bad it may be, is a kind of companion to me, a thing that seems to live as it grows under my hand. My models interest me, and through them I have become acquainted with several humble households in Florence, and find a great deal to interest me in this warm-hearted, hot-headed race. Best of all, I am away from old scenes, old associations; and sometimes, sitting dreaming in my sunny balcony, with the blue waters of the Arno gliding past under my feet, I almost believe that I am some new creature without a history, and not that Dora Wyllard who was once mistress of Pennorval.

"I wish you and Bothwell would take your honeymoon holiday in the South, and spend a week or two here with me. There is plenty of accommodation for you in these grand old apartments of mine—a first-floor of a dozen rooms, all large and lofty. My old servants keep everything in exquisite order, and are devoted in their attention to me.

"It was a pleasure to me to see your brother when he was stay-

ing in Florence. Tell him that I left Vallombrosa only a week ago, and was very sorry to come away from wood and mountain even then."

Hilda and her husband accepted this friendly invitation, and spent half their honeymoon on the road to Florence, and the other half in that picturesque city. They found Dora the shadow of her former self. She had a gentle air of resignation, a pensive placidity which was inexpressibly touching. She never mentioned her dead husband. She was full of thoughtfulness for others, and had made herself the adored benefactress of a little colony of poor Florentines. She had furnished her rooms and established herself in a manner which indicated the intention to make a permanent home in the city; and here Bothwell and his wife left her, with deep regret.

"Will you never come back to Cornwall, Dora?" Hilda asked, piteously, in the last farewell moments at the railway-station.

"Never is a long word, dearest. I suppose I shall see the old places again some day; but I must be a good deal older than I am now—a good deal further away from my old sorrows."

Dora spoke without reckoning upon that Providence which shapes our ends in spite of us; and happily for the cause of true love, Providence found a way of bringing Dora Wyllard back to Cornwall much sooner than she had intended to return.

A little more than a year after Bothwell and his wife left Florence, the happy home of Trevenna was darkened by the shadow of an awful fear. A son had been born to Bothwell Grahame; and before the boy was a week old the young mother was in imminent danger of death. Edward Heathcote was in Italy, spending his autumn holiday, going over much of the same ground that he had visited before, and loitering longer and later than the previous year. A telegram from Bothwell told him of his sister's peril; and another telegram reached Mrs. Wyllard from the same source. Moved by the same impulse, Dora and Heathcote met at the station, each on the same errand, bent on starting by the first train for Paris. They traveled together in sad and silent companionship, each oppressed by the fear of a great calamity.

Heathcote had telegraphed before he started, asking for a telegram to meet him at the Paris station, and here the message brought a ray of comfort.

"A little better. The doctors are more hopeful."

Anxious days and nights followed Dora's arrival at Trevenna. Poor Bothwell suffered a suppressed agony of grief, which seemed to have aged him at least ten years by the time the crisis was past, and the young mother was able to smile upon her first-born. Happily these markings of care are soon erased from youthful faces; and before Christmas Bothwell was himself again, and ready to receive a new batch of pupils, the old lot having been disposed of triumphantly in the summer before his son's birth.

Dora stayed in Cornwall during that winter of '83 and '84, and she is in Cornwall still, but not at Penmorval. She has established herself at her birth-place, Tregony Manor, near the Land's End; and her old friends and neighbors flock around her, the people who knew her mother, the friends of her childish days, of her happy

girlhood. They bring back sweet memories of the old time, and help to wean her from her gloomy thoughts.

One of her old companions, a spinster of thirty summers, is very often with her in the familiar home. They seem almost like the girl-friends of the past, painting together, playing, singing, working. All the old occupations have been resumed, as if the ten years intervening had hardly made any break in the two lives.

"Sometimes I fancy it is all a dream, and that you have never been away from Tregony," says Miss Beauchamp, one morning when they are sitting at work. "If we had but your dear good mother over there in her favorite chair by the fireplace, I should quite believe the last ten years to be only a dream. But she is gone, dear soul, and that makes a sad difference. Do you know, yesterday, when I looked out of the window and saw you and Mr. Heathcote walking on the terrace, I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was awake. You both looked exactly as you used to look ten years ago, when you were engaged."

Dora went on with her work in placid silence.

"Dora, he is so good, so loyal, so devoted to you," cried Miss Beauchamp, in her affectionate impulsive way. "You can not be so cruel as to spoil his life forever. Surely you will reward him some day."

"Some day," sang Dora softly, with her face bent low over her work: and her story ends thus with the refrain of a popular ballad.

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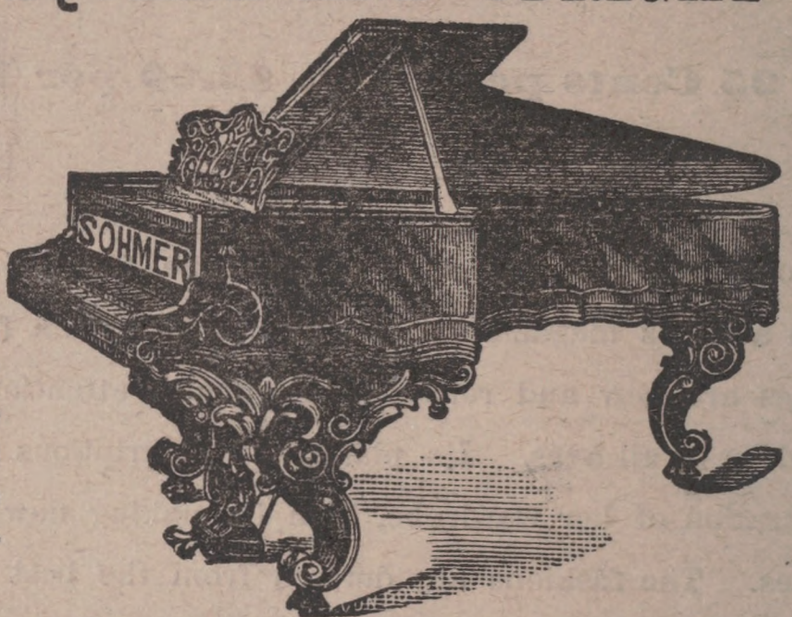

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